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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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Nehru & Indira saw people as problems: Modi in RS

Speaker asks PM to skip LS citing 'threat' from Cong MPs

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday launched a broad attack on the Opposition during a 100-minute speech in the Rajya Sabha, accusing it of decades of misrule, protecting "infiltrators". He said much of the NDA government's decade in power had been spent "correcting the mistakes of the past".

"Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi considered our people as problems and rigid policies made the Planning Commission citizen-unfriendly," he said, as the Opposition protests continued in Parliament demanding a statement and clarity on the India–US trade deal.

Modi's remarks in the Upper House were met with sloganeering and an Opposition walkout. Opposition parties also demanded that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi be allowed to speak on former Army chief MM Naravane's memoir concerning the 2020 India–China clash.

Earlier in the day, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla said he had "concrete information" that some Congress members might approach the Prime Minister's seat and carry out an "unexpected act". He said he had therefore requested Modi not to come to the House to reply to the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address. The Lok Sabha later passed the motion without the Prime Minister's customary reply.

Stealing is their (Congress's) ancestral profession. They even stole a Gujarati surname, Mahatma Gandhi's surname, and the people are now teaching them a lesson

—Narendra Modi, PM

Are they scared of the Epstein files? Or that we will question them about the India–US deal due to which farmers will suffer?

—Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Congress MP

- Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla said he had "concrete information" that some Congress members might approach the Prime Minister's seat and carry out an "unexpected act".

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra dismissed the Speaker's claim as an "absolute lie", alleging the Prime Minister was "hiding behind" the Chair.

In the Rajya Sabha, Modi defended India's recent trade agreements, calling them "future-ready". He said deals with the European Union and the United States had boosted global confidence in India.

Modi also accused the Congress of hatred, citing slogans such as "Modi teri kabr khudegi. Raise as many slogans as you want... you will not be able to dig my grave," Modi asserted.

He defended BJP leader Ravneet Singh Bittu after Rahul Gandhi referred to him as a "traitor", accusing the Congress of animosity towards Sikhs.

Taking a swipe at West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, Modi accused the Trinamool Congress of going to court to protect "illegal immigrants". —*PTI*

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India, US to sign trade pact by mid-March: Goyal

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

India and the United States are likely to sign the first tranche of their long-awaited bilateral trade agreement by mid-March, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Thursday.

Following the signing, India will begin reducing import duties on select goods imported from the US. Goyal said the two countries are also expected to finalise and sign a joint statement shortly, after which tariffs imposed by Washington on Indian goods will be brought down to 18 per cent.

At present, Indian exports to the US attract a 50 per cent import duty, comprising a 25 per cent reciprocal tariff and an additional 25 per cent levy imposed over India's purchase of Russian crude oil.

The minister clarified that the first tranche of the agreement does not include any investment commitments. On the proposed USD 500 billion purchase component of the broader deal, Goyal said India's rapidly growing economy would require large volumes of energy, data centre equipment and information and communications technology products in the coming years.

Meanwhile, India reiterated that ensuring energy security for its 1.4 billion people remains its highest priority while deciding its sourcing strategy. This includes exploring crude oil purchases from Venezuela, the government said.

The assertion came days after US President Donald Trump claimed that India had agreed to stop buying Russian oil and would instead buy significantly more energy from the US and potentially Venezuela.

The government told Parliament that it "remains engaged" with all parties concerned in order to address the implications of recent changes in US sanctions policies on India's participation in the Chabahar project. —*PTI*

WB polls: Cong to fight solo, CPI(M) open to tie-ups

NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, 5 FEB

Even as the Congress has decided to fight the upcoming West Bengal Assembly elections on its own, the CPI(M) on Thursday said it remains open to joining hands with any force willing to take on both the Trinamool Congress and the BJP. The Congress announced it would contest all 294 Assembly seats independently, a decision taken at a meeting of the party's top leadership with senior West Bengal leaders at party President Mallikarjun Kharge's residence in New Delhi. —*PTI*

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India gets 1st cooperative-based taxi service

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Union Cooperation Minister Amit Shah on Thursday launched Bharat Taxi, the country's first co-operative-run ride-hailing platform, which will start services in Delhi-NCR and Gujarat initially and pan-India in the next three years. Bharat Taxi platform has been established by India's top eight co-operative organistions including dairy major Amul.Shah said the platform would keep Rs 20 out of every Rs 100 earned, and Rs 80 would go to the drivers' bank accounts. Even the ownership of Rs 20 would be with the drivers. Customers can hail cars, three-wheelers and two-wheelers through the platform. Bharat Taxi operates on a zero-commission and surge-free pricing model with direct profit distribution among drivers. —*PTI*

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Rajpal Yadav surrenders in cheque bounce case

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Actor Rajpal Yadav surrendered to Tihar Jail authorities on Thursday following the Delhi High Court's refusal to extend the deadline for his surrender in connection with cheque-bounce convictions. A jail official confirmed, "He surrendered at 4pm. The authorities will now follow the standard operating procedure." The High Court had on Wednesday denied Yadav's request for an extension. His counsel had told the court that Yadav had arranged Rs 50 lakh and sought an additional week to make the payment. However, Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma rejected the plea, stating there were no grounds to grant him further relief. —*PTI*

Cops say 'don't worry' as 800 go missing in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Amid growing concerns over the around 800 people who went missing in Delhi in just 15 days, the Delhi Police today clarified that there has been "no unusual or alarming surge" in missing persons cases in the city. The Delhi Police statement comes amid reports of the disappearance of 807 people from Delhi in just 15 days, an average of nearly 54 people every day, which has raised serious questions about public safety and policing in the city. In an official statement, the police said that in 2026 January alone, 1,777 missing cases were reported. On average, around 2,000 people are reported missing in Delhi every month, a trend that has remained largely consistent over the years. —*PTI*

18 dead in Meghalaya illegal coal mine blast

SHILLONG, 5 FEB

At least 18 labourers were killed, and several others feared trapped following an explosion at an "illegal" coal mine in Meghalaya's East Jaintia Hills district on Thursday.

Rescue teams have been engaged in search operations at the site of the incident in the Thangsku area.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that an ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh would be provided to the next of kin of each deceased, while the injured would be given Rs 50,000.

Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma expressed grief over the incident and announced a probe.

"Accountability will be fixed, and those responsible will face strict legal action," Sangma said.

One of the injured was initially taken to Sutnga Primary Health Centre before being referred to a Shillong hospital for better treatment.

The explosion is suspected to have occurred during coal mining activities at the site, which is believed to be an illegal operation.

The National Green Tribunal had imposed a ban on rat-hole coal mining and other unscientific mining practices in Meghalaya in 2014, citing environmental damage and safety risks, while also restricting illegal transportation of coal.

Smoke billows after an explosion at an illegal coal mine in Meghalaya on Thursday —*PTI*

Rat-hole mining involves digging of narrow tunnels, usually 3-4 feet high, for workers to enter and extract coal. The horizontal tunnels are often termed "rat-holes", as each just about fits one person.

The Supreme Court later upheld the ban and allowed mining only under scientific and regulated procedures with environmental safeguards. —*PTI*

K'TAKA POLICE TO START DRIVE TO IDENTIFY B'DESHIS: HM

BENGALURU, 5 FEB

Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara on Thursday said he has directed the police to conduct a statewide drive to identify Bangladeshi or other foreign nationals staying illegally here.

Directions have been issued to identify chemical factories operating across Karnataka and to record their trade licences and activities as part of efforts to curb drug manufacturing.

He said there were conflicting claims about the number of illegal Bangladeshi nationals in the state. Some claimed the state has 20 lakh illegal Bangladeshis. As per government records, around 370 people have been deported.

However, the Regional Registration Office's records did not indicate a large number of foreign nationals illegally staying in the state.

Parameshwara said that police have been instructed to identify chemical factories within city limits, inspect them, bring them on record and monitor their activities.

"Officials have already begun the exercise of recording where chemical factories are located, what they manufacture and whether they possess valid trade licences." he said. He added that instructions had also been given to conduct inspections rigorously within the Bengaluru Police Commissionerate limits. —*PTI*

K'taka Cabinet clears AI tool to track fake news, terror recruitment

BENGALURU, 5 FEB

The Karnataka cabinet on Thursday approved an AI-driven Social Media Analytical Solution (SMAS) aimed at identifying fake news and online threats at their source, at an estimated cost of Rs 67.20 crore.

Briefing reporters after the cabinet meeting, Minister H K Patil said social media content would be scanned by the government using the fully automated, AI-based system. He said SMAS would help detect misinformation, trace its original source and support informed decision-making.

According to Patil, the system would also monitor potential recruitment by terror outfits and help identify child trafficking, defamatory content and other serious online threats. Posts deemed dangerous would be flagged to authorities or deleted. He stressed that there would be no human intervention in the process and that digital platforms of mainstream media would not be monitored.

Responding to questions on the legality of scanning social media posts, Patil said there was "absolutely no bar" under the law to screen content for manipulation or criminal intent.

In a separate decision, the cabinet approved the Karnataka Gram Swaraj and Panchayat Raj (Amendment) Bill, 2026, paving the way for the use of ballot papers and ballot boxes in upcoming Panchayat elections. Patil said the existing law did not provide for paper ballots, necessitating amendments. The Congress-led government has expressed concerns over Electronic Voting Machines, citing erosion of public confidence, and had last year recommended that the State Election Commission conduct future Panchayat and urban local body elections using ballot papers instead of EVMs. —*PTI*

Clashes in Manipur amid protests against new DyCM

CHURACHANDPUR, 5 FEB

A mob clashed with security forces in Kuki dominated Churachandpur district of Manipur on Thursday evening amid protests over an MLA from the community, Nemcha Kipgen, joining the BJP-led government as deputy chief minister.

The protesters gathered near Tuibong Bazaar and torched a heap of discarded materials, including tyres, while raising slogans against Kipgen, officials said.

The situation escalated when security forces attempted to disperse the crowd. The mob, which outnumbered the personnel deployed, pelted stones, prompting a baton charge. Two people sustained minor injuries in the incident, they said.

"The situation remains tense, and additional forces have been rushed to bring it under control," a senior officer said. Tensions have been simmering in the district since Wednesday evening after Kipgen, who hails from Kangpokpi, took oath as deputy chief minister. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

NAMMA GIRLS DO IT AGAIN!

Mandhana masterclass powers RCB to 2nd WPL title

VADODARA, 5 FEB

A dominant Royal Challengers Bengaluru, inspired by captain Smriti Mandhana's sublime 87, lifted their second Women's Premier League title with a six-wicket victory over Delhi Capitals on Thursday, consigning their rivals to a fourth final defeat.

Chasing a daunting 204, RCB completed a record run chase with two balls to spare, drawing level with Mumbai Indians as the most successful teams in WPL history. Mandhana was in imperious form, smashing 87 off just 41 balls, while Georgia Voll played a vital supporting role with a fluent 79 off 54 deliveries. The pair added a match-defining 165-run stand for the second wicket.

RCB's Smriti Mandhana with Georgia Voll during the WPL final match with Delhi Capitals at Baroda Cricket Association Stadium on Thursday —*PTI*

Earlier, Delhi Capitals posted a formidable 203 for four after being put in. Captain Jemimah Rodrigues led from the front with a sparkling 57 off 37 balls, while Chinelle Henry provided late impetus with a blistering 35 off 15. Laura Wolvaardt made an unbeaten 44 off 25 balls and Lizelle Lee contributed 37 off 30.

RCB made a disciplined start with the ball before Lee broke free in an expensive fourth over. Shafali Verma was dismissed by Arundhati Reddy, while Nadine de Klerk ended Lee's dangerous stay. Rodrigues and Wolvaardt then added 76 runs to maintain Delhi's momentum.

In reply, RCB lost Grace Harris early, but Mandhana and Voll counter-attacked superbly, reaching 100 at the halfway stage. Mandhana brought up her half-century in just 23 balls, peppering the boundary with authority.

Though Voll's dismissal briefly raised Delhi's hopes, RCB kept their nerve to seal a memorable triumph, repeating their 2024 final success over the Capitals. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Ex 'Bigg Boss' contestant booked for public smoking

MYSURU, 5 FEB

Lakshmipuram Police of Mysuru have registered an FIR against a former contestant of 'Bigg Boss' reality show Rajath for smoking in public places in the city. As a viral video of Rajath was found smoking by holding a cigarette at Old DC office building, one of the prominent heritage spots and public city during the photoshoot event, circulated in social media. The police have registered a suo moto case against the celebrity for posting such videos in social media. *—SALAR NEWS*

Man killed in elephant attack in Mysuru

MYSURU, 5 FEB

A farmer in B Matakere village in Saragur taluk has died after being attacked by an elephant early on Thursday. Mada, 65, was found dead at the spot. The jumbo trampled him to death on the spot when Mada, who was a security guard for a local temple, went to attend nature call in the wee hours near B Matakere ST Colony. Meanwhile, villagers of BT Matakere vent their ire on forest department officials for their failure to prevent human-animal conflict, to prevent wild jumbos straying out of forest, stop attacking people and destroying crops and their properties in forest fringe villages when the forest department officials arrived at the spot. *—SALAR NEWS*

CM begins Budget preparation amid leadership row

BENGALURU, 5 FEB

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, who also holds the finance portfolio, on Thursday formally began budget preparation, by holding day long meetings with various departments. The 2026-27 Budget is likely to be presented in March. Siddaramaiah has asserted that he would present his record 17th budget amid an alleged power tussle with his Deputy DK Shivakumar. The row reignited on Thursday as Congress MLA for Channagiri, Shivaganga V Basavaraj batted for Shivakumar to take over. "Waiting till the Budget is over will take one month's time. They should be called to Delhi in a couple of days to resolve it." Shivakumar said that any decision on leadership change requires the High Command. *—PTI*

LEGAL RIGHTS

In order to help women make informed legal choices to protect their rights., an organisation is hosting a free event at Excellent English School, Bismillah Nagar, Bengaluru on 7th February between 10.30 am and 2.30pm. ReachLawyer Trust's Sóz programme is designed to help women who want to know their rights or seek legal guidance. To register, call, Nitin Bubberjung +919036089137; Tuba Sanobar +919689295684 or Khudsiya +918884701964.

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Tejasvi demands Metro fare hike be rolled back

Central body is in-charge of hiking fares, says Shivakumar

BENGALURU, 5 FEB

Bengaluru South MP Tejasvi Surya met Union Housing Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Thursday over the Metro fare hike. He said that the fare hike stemmed from multiple math errors and urged the Union Minister to put the annual hike on hold.

The Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) confirmed that the annual automatic fare revision will come into effect from 9 February, and will hike prices between Rs 1 to Rs 5 based on the distance. It said it was being implemented as per the First Fare Fixation Committee (FFC) constituted under the Metro Railways (Operation & Maintenance) Act, 2002.

However, Surya said that the revision has made the City's Metro the most expensive in the country. Sharing a letter he submitted to Khattar on X, Surya said that there were "multiple arithmetic errors in the revised fare calculation. These errors arise mainly due to the selection of the wrong base year of 2016-17".

Although these have been flagged several times, the BJP leader claimed that "the BMRCL is yet to correct the anomalies. Commuters are continuing to be overcharged for their Metro travel."

Surya urged Khattar to constitute a new FCC for Bengaluru to rectify the anomalies. He also requested the annual hike be put on hold until the fares are rationalised. On X, Surya added that the Union Minister responded positively, and slammed the State Congress government.

However, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said that the decision to hike the fares was made by a Central government-led committee and is not under the State's control.

"No file has come to me. They have their own team of central government officials who will decide.I also saw it on TV," the Bengaluru Development Minister said.

Similarly, Home Minister G Parameshwara accused the BJP of politicising the issue. "What else can the BJP do other than criticise us?"

Meanwhile, BMRCL Director Sumit Bhatnagar said the Metro will expand around 175 km adding close to 127 stations within the next two years, and said that elevator and escalators safety are now its top priorities. *—SALAR NEWS*

SC upholds Cong MLA Nanjegowda's 2023 poll win

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

- After BJP's Malur candidate KS Manjunath Gowda alleged that he lost the polls by a margin of barely 248 votes, the the Supreme Court had ordered a recount of the results

The Supreme Court on Thursday upheld the election of Congress MLA KY Nanjegowda from Malur in the 2023 Karnataka assembly election.

The apex court had earlier stayed the Karnataka High Court order that set aside his election, while directing the Election Commission to conduct a recount of votes cast in his Constituency for the 2023 Assembly Election and submit the result to it in a sealed cover.

The Supreme Court opened the sealed cover and found that according to the recount, Nanjegowda had secured 50,957 votes while the BJP's KS Manjunath Gowda had received 50,707 votes.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi said that Nanjegowda's election therefore remained unaffected.

"Consequently, we allow this appeal, to the extent that the impugned decision of setting aside the election of appellant is set aside and the election of the appellant from Malur is upheld," the bench said.

The BJP candidate filed an election petition in the High Court after Nanjegowda won by a margin of only 248 votes against Gowda, alleging irregularities in the counting process. *—PTI*

Cross-border organised scam racket traced to Nepal, 11 held

MANGALURU, 5 FEB

Mangaluru police have busted a cross-border investment fraud syndicate operating from Nepal that allegedly cheated Indian citizens of crores of rupees, arresting 11 accused in the case, officials said on Thursday.

Addressing the media, Mangaluru Police Commissioner Sudheer Kumar Reddy said investigations revealed that 17 people, 16 Indians and one Chinese national, were involved in the scam. While 11 Indians have been arrested by the City Central Crime police, five others remain absconding. The Nepal police arrested the Chinese national.

Police seized one laptop, 21 mobiles, 20 SIM cards and multiple debit and credit cards during the operation. Digital forensic analysis of the devices uncovered details of 624 bank accounts used to route fraudulent funds. More than 4,580 complaints linked to these accounts have been registered on the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal, with one account alone handling transactions worth Rs 167 crore.

The case originated from a complaint in which a victim was allegedly cheated of Rs 1.38 crore through transfers to 10 bank accounts. Those accounts were later found linked to at least 128 fraud cases nationwide.

Police said the gang recruited account holders and agents via social media, diverted funds into cryptocurrency, and remitted money abroad.

Reddy also warned of digital slavery, where youths are lured overseas on false job promises, detained, and forced to carry out cyber fraud. *—SALAR NEWS*

GRADUATION DAY

AICC Secretary Mansoor Ali Khan attended the graduation day at Anjuman E Islamia Madaris Un Niswan and presented certificates to the students, at Shivajinagar, on Thursday PHOTO: SALAR

SIX COWS POISONED TO DEATH IN MYSURU'S HANUR

MYSURU, 5 FEB

Six cows were poisoned to death by miscreants when they went to graze nearby forest areas at Mamaradoddi in Hanur taluk of Chamarajanagar district on Thursday. Cattles belong to Thangavelu of the village.

As usual, Tangavelu took the cows to graze nearby forest areas. Few hours of grazing in the forest areas, his cows were found dead after wailing in an open field near the village.

A similar case of poisoning another five cattles to death by miscreants was reported on Wednesday in neighbouring Shettally village after they went to graze in the forest.

Following increasing incidents , a team of revenue department officers and animal husbandry veterinary sciences visited Mamaradoddi village, inspected the spot, collected the samples and sent them to the laboratory after conducting the post-mortem of the animals.

Hanur taluk tahasildar Chaithra told reporters that samples were sent to the laboratory after conducting the post-mortem of the animals. Taluk administration will initiate stern action against the culprits involved in poisoning cows to death belonging to farmers. *—SALAR NEWS*

Over 20 cars gutted in fire mishap at Vijayapura service centre

In a separate incident, a firefighter battles a blaze at Srinidhi Layout, near Konanakunte Cross, in the City, on Thursday *—MOHAMMED ASAD*

VIJAYAPURA, 5 FEB

At least 20 cars were gutted in a major fire mishap at a car service centre in Vijayapura in the wee hours of Thursday, police said.

Spare parts worth around Rs 35 lakh stored at the outlet were also gutted.

The fire broke out at HMK Car Service Centre located along National Highway 50 where vehicles of various companies had been parked for repair and servicing.

Police said the blaze rapidly spread, reducing the entire service centre to ashes.

Police said the exact cause of the fire is yet to be ascertained.

Fire and emergency services personnel rushed to the spot and managed to bring the blaze under control.

No casualties were reported in the incident, police added. Officials rushed to the spot and conducted an investigation. *—PTI*

3 women workers killed in Gadag accident

GADAG, 5 FEB

- Dozens of vehicles on the road transport workers on overloaded seats, violating norms, sources said

Three daily-wage women workers were killed and 15 others were injured when a mini commercial vehicle carrying workers rammed into a truck in Gadag district near Jigallur cross in Ron taluk on Thursday, police said. The victims were travelling in a car that collided with a canter truck while en route from Gajendragad to their workplace.

The deceased, Mariyambu Dadasab Hunagund, 55; Annapurna Laxman Chingale, 45; and Sujatha Rajappa Hosamani, 33 and the injured are all residents of Shivaji Nagar in Gajendragad.

The injured were rushed to a nearby hospital, where many of them are critical.

Police have registered a case against the car owner and driver for carrying passengers beyond the permitted capacity, Ron Police Inspector Vijaykumar said. "The labourers were even not provided the safety outfits during working hours. The lapses have been brought to the labour department."

Dozens of vehicles there transport workers on overloaded seats, violating norms, sources said. *—SALAR NEWS*

No politics in Lingayat legislators' meeting, says MB Patil

BENGALURU, 5 FEB

MB Patil said the recent meeting of the Lingayat Congress legislators was not a show of strength, but it was for the welfare of the community. According to him, the Aland MLA BR Patil had mooted the proposal, which Ramdurg MLA Ashok Pattan endorsed and convened a meeting of the Lingayat legislators a few days ago. "It was not a power display. Discussions were held only on community welfare," MB Patil asserted.

"We are the biggest chunk. Our striking rate is the highest," he added. Highlighting the community's political contribution, he said, "In 1989, with Lingayat support, the Congress won 178 seats and created history. Our party (Congress) gave ticket to 56 Lingayat leaders in the 2023 Assembly election, out of which 36 had won."

"Seeking adequate representation in the government is not wrong, but we will not take away another community's share," MB Patil said, while cautoning against politicising the meeting. *—PTI*

5 STAB LAWYER COMPLAINING ABOUT PIG THEFT

HUMNABAD, 5 FEB

A lawyer was attacked and stabbed in the Hallikhed police station limits on Tuesday in the neck after attempting to file a complaint about pig theft. A case has been registered against 11 people, with five already arrested.

The injured lawyer, Anil, 30, from Benachincholi village, was assaulted by residents of Hudgi village, including Ajay, Ramesh, Raju, Sanju, Manik, Narasappa Tukaram, Kantamma Sangeeta, and an unidentified person.

The pigs belonged to Anil's brother, Vijaykumar. When Anil questioned some from Hudgi about the theft near the Humanabad railway gate and went to lodge a police complaint, police told him to visit the spot. While heading there on his bike, the accused allegedly attacked him, with the intent to kill.

Anil is undergoing treatment. Six suspects remain at large. Members of the Bar Association have submitted a representation to the Additional Superintendent of police, calling for lawyer protection. *—SALAR NEWS*

Joint push for B'luru-Pune-Mumbai rail

BENGALURU, 5 FEB

Minister MB Patil welcomed the initiative taken by Union Ministers Pralhad Joshi and HD Kumaraswamy to discuss the proposed Bengaluru-Pune-Mumbai high-speed rail corridor.

"Immediately after the Budget, I said there was a need for a high-speed rail... I thank Joshi and Kumaraswamy for taking up the matter with Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw. There is no politics," the Minister for Large and Medium Industries told press on Thursday. He said improved connectivity would benefit central and Northern Karnataka and western Maharashtra. Patil said the proposed high-speed rail corridors between Bengaluru-Hyderabad and Bengaluru-Chennai would not bring the benefits that the Bengaluru-Pune-Mumbai could. *—PTI*

8 Victoria Hospital staffers booked for graft

BENGALURU, 5 FEB

Police have registered an FIR against eight outsourced staffers working at the Infosys Lab billing counter at the government-run Victoria Hospital here, for allegedly misappropriating government funds amounting to Rs 23.78 lakh collected from patients for blood tests.

The accused are the Data Entry Operators (DEO), who had allegedly displayed their own UPI QR code and diverted money to their accounts.

The case was registered at the Visvesvarapuram police station on 3 February after a complaint by Dr Deepak S, the Superintendent of Victoria the Hospital.

The alleged offence took place between 1 January, 2025 and 31 May, 2025, police said.

The accused are Preethi, Punitha, Salma, Satya, Mahendra, Shashikala, Lakshmikanthamma, and Darshan. *— PTI*

DEMAND RS 1 CR

3 'journalists' install cameras in woman's house, blackmail her

BELAGAVI, 5 FEB

Malmaruti police in Belagavi arrested three men pretending to be journalists, for allegedly blackmailing a senior woman government official after installing hidden cameras in her residence and threatening to circulate the footage on social media unless they were paid Rs 1 crore.

The accused, Sameer Nissar Ahmed Sheikh, 32; Abdul Rasheed Makanadar, 51; and Mohammed Balekundri gained entry into the official's house on the pretext of work and installed a concealed camera in the bedroom, police said.

They later sent the recorded footage to the official and demanded Rs 1 crore, threatening to release the visuals on social media if the money was not paid. They subsequently reduced their demand to Rs 50 lakh, police said.

Refusing to yield to the threat, the official approached Belagavi Police Commissioner Bhushan Borase and filed a complaint with Malmaruti police.

A team led by Inspector BR Gadekar arrested the accused.

"Those arrested are not journalists. They used fake identity cards to threaten the official. Further investigation is under way to ascertain the extent of their fraud network," Borase said. *—SALAR NEWS*

-PTI

'NDA spent Rs 40K cr to defeat Grand Alliance'

PATNA, 5 FEB

RJD working president Tejashwi Yadav on Thursday claimed that the ruling NDA in Bihar had spent Rs 40,000 crore to defeat the Mahagathbandhan in the 2025 assembly elections. The leader of the Opposition, made the indirect reference to a series of sops offered by the Nitish Kumar government in the run-up to the polls, while participating in a debate on the motion of thanks to the Governor's reply. "You people have reduced lok tantra (democracy) to a rule of fear and intimidation (dar tantra)", alleged Yadav He slammed the government for demeaning women while seeking votes.—*PTI*

Crackdown on double-meaning songs in Bihar

PATNA, 5 FEB

Bihar Police has ordered a state wide crackdown on vulgar and double-meaning songs, calling them a social problem that endangers women's safety and harms children's minds, Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary said on Thursday. Holding the Home portfolio, Choudhary said all district police units have been directed to launch a special drive ahead of Holi against those playing obscene songs at public places and in buses, trucks and auto-rickshaws. Offenders will be booked under relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita. A circular has been issued to all district police chiefs, directing strict action against violators. The issue was earlier raised in the Bihar Assembly in 2023, when the government had assured firm action against those responsible.—*PTI*

EPS kicks off poll pitch, AIADMK launches campaign

CHENNAI, 5 FEB

With party Chief Edappadi K Palaniswami announcing poll promises for the upcoming Tamil Nadu Assembly election, AIADMK district secretaries initiated an outreach campaign. This move follows the crucial district secretaries meeting chaired by the AIADMK general secretary at the party's state headquarters in Royapettah here on 4 February. The office bearers of Ariyalur, Thanjavur South, Chengalpattu West, Perambalur, Cuddalore west and Chengalpattu East districts, among others, commenced the campaign distributing pamphlets containing the AIADMK's election promises to the public. Palaniswami unveiled ten election promises on the social welfare front, employment, housing and women empowerment, as the first among the political parties to announce the poll manifesto.—*PTI*

Mizoram opposes Indo-Myanmar border fencing

AIZAWL, 5 FEB

The Mizoram Cabinet has reiterated its opposition to the Centre's plan to fence the Indo-Myanmar border, while acknowledging that it has no legal authority to block the move, an official said. A meeting of the council of ministers, chaired by Chief Minister Lalduhoma, on Wednesday reaffirmed the state government's stand against erecting a fence along the 510-km-long Mizoram sector of the international border. "The cabinet maintains that the state government stands by its original position. However, as border fencing is a Union subject, the state government does not have the power to oppose it," the official said. The cabinet's reiteration follows a resolution adopted y the Mizoram Assembly opposing the Centre's proposal to fence the border and scrap the Free Movement Regime.—*PTI*

Oppn walks out as LoP not allowed to speak in Parl

Modi takes a dig at Kharge, asks him to sit and raise slogans

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Opposition MPs in the Rajya Sabha on Thursday raised slogans and staged a walkout as Prime Minister Narendra Modi replied to the discussion on the Motion of Thanks to the President's Address, amid protests over the Leader of Opposition being denied an opportunity to speak.

As Modi rose to reply, Opposition members urged Chairperson CP Radhakrishnan to allow LoP Mallikarjun Kharge to speak. When the request was disallowed, sloganeering erupted from the Opposition benches. Amid the uproar, the PM continued his speech and took a jibe at Kharge, saying, "Considering his age, he can sit and raise slogans," triggering sharper protests.

The Opposition said the protest was linked to Rahul Gandhi, LoP in the Lok Sabha, being prevented from completing his speech during the debate on the President's Address in the Lower House. None of the Opposition MPs participated in that debate, and the Motion of Thanks was later passed without the customary reply by the Prime Minister — an unprecedented development.

Slogans such as "tanashahi nahi chalegi" and "Let LoP speak" echoed in the Rajya Sabha before Opposition MPs walked out through the Makar Dwar. Outside Parliament, Kharge said silencing the Opposition undermined parliamentary democracy. CPI(M) MP John Brittas and DMK's Tiruchi Siva said the demand was only to allow Kharge to speak briefly to register protest.

In his reply, Modi accused the Congress of insulting the President, the Constitution, tribals, Dalits and people from the northeast during disruptions in the Lok Sabha. He said India's global standing had strengthened following trade engagements with the EU and the US, while also taking repeated jibes at the Congress and the Gandhi family.

The Congress hit back strongly, with Jairam Ramesh calling the PM's 97-minute address an "election rally speech". Rahul Gandhi said Modi was "afraid of the truth" and had "taken refuge in lies", deepening the political stand-off that continues to disrupt parliamentary proceedings. —*PTI*

Congress MPs Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, MP Rajesh Ranjan alias Pappu Yadav and others during the Budget Session of Parliament, in New Delhi —*PTI*

Over 3,800 Indian nationals deported from US in 2025: Govt tells Parliament

Nadda and Kharge spar over 'gag'

New Delhi, 5 Feb

Parliament witnessed sharp confrontations on Thursday as Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge accused the government of gagging Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi, while Rajya Sabha Leader of the House JP Nadda countered that Lok Sabha proceedings could not be debated in the Upper House. The Lok Sabha was adjourned soon after it met, following protests over Gandhi being denied permission to speak and attempts to disrupt PM Modi's address on the Motion of Thanks. The disruption spilled into the Rajya Sabha, with slogan-shouting and interruptions. Union Minister Kiren Rijiju criticised the Opposition for violating parliamentary norms, urging members to respect House. —*AGENCIES*

Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla with CM Yumnam Khemchand Singh, in Imphal, on Thursday -*PTI*

Kukis warn MLAs not to participate in govt formation

IMPHAL, 5 FEB

Ahead of the new session of the Manipur assembly scheduled for Thursday, several Kuki groups in Manipur have warned their community legislators not to participate in the proceedings.

Marking the beginning of collective decision-making and governance for the newly constituted state cabinet, the newly formed Manipur government held its first cabinet meeting on Wednesday night, hours after BJP MLA Yumnam Khemchand Singh was sworn in as the state's 13th chief minister and Nemcha Kipgen of the Kuki community and L Dikho of the Naga community took oath as deputy chief ministers, an official release said.

In response, the Joint Forum of Seven (JF7) has called for a 12-hour 'total shutdown' across Kuki-Zo–dominated areas of Churachandpur this Friday from 6 am to 6 pm, urging residents to join statewide protests demanding a separate Kuki administration. The Kuki Zo Council warned that any community MLA defying its collective decision would do so individually and at their own risk.

The Kuki Liberation Army (Letkholun), in a statement, said it is issuing a "clear and final warning" that any Kuki Zo representative who chooses to participate in the formation of a popular government shall be deemed to have acted in betrayal of the community people.

This follows months of ethnic violence between the Meitei and Kuki communities in the state, which led to the imposition of President's Rule. —*PTI*

LoP in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, with Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, party MP KC Venugopal, and other West Bengal leaders during a party meeting in New Delhi —*PTI*

Bengal polls: Cong to fight solo, CPI(M) open to tie-ups

NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, 5 FEB

Even as the Congress has decided to fight the upcoming West Bengal Assembly elections on its own, the CPI(M) on Thursday said it remains open to joining hands with any force willing to take on both the Trinamool Congress and the BJP.

The Congress announced it would contest all 294 Assembly seats independently, a decision taken at a meeting of the party's top leadership with senior West Bengal leaders at party President Mallikarjun Kharge's residence in New Delhi. Congress General Secretary in-charge Ghulam Ahmed Mir said past alliances in the state had demoralised grassroots workers. "After discussions with everyone, it has been decided that the Congress will contest all 294 seats independently in West Bengal," he said, adding preparations would begin immediately. In the 2021 Assembly polls, the Congress had failed to win any seat despite contesting in alliance with the Left Front.

Reacting to the development, CPI(M) West Bengal State Secretary Mohammed Salim said the Left was speaking to "everyone" opposed to the TMC and the BJP. "We want all forces against the TMC and BJP to come together and fight against them," Salim said, while acknowledging that no fruitful talks with the Congress on a pre-poll alliance had taken place so far. With the Assembly polls due in about three months, both parties appear set to chart separate political. —*PTI*

WB's budget turns welfare into electoral currency

KOLKATA, 5 FEB

The West Bengal government on Thursday tabled an interim budget of Rs 4.06 lakh crore for the 2026–27 fiscal year. With Assembly polls due in less than three months, the budget introduces cash support and allowance hikes targeting women, youth and frontline workers.

The budget focuses on women voters—nearly half the electorate—with a proposed Rs 500 hike in the Lakshmir Bhandar allowance from February and an allocation of Rs 15,000 crore. Payments currently stand at Rs 1,000 for general category women and Rs 1,200 for SC/ST women.

West Bengal Finance Minister Chandrima Bhattacharya and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee speak on the state Budget in Kolkata —*PT*

State Finance Minister Chandrima Bhattacharya also announced Banglar Yuva Sathi, a scheme offering Rs 1,500 a month to unemployed people aged 21–40 for up to five years, to be launched on 15 August if the Trinamool Congress returns to power.

Anganwadi and ASHA workers, civic volunteers, Green Police personnel and village police received allowance hikes, along with death compensation. —*PTI*

Kerala passes resolution against G RAM G Act

THIRU.PURAM, 5 FEB

The Kerala Assembly on Thursday passed a resolution demanding that the Centre withdraw the newly enacted VB-G RAM G Act and restore MGNREGA, joining three other non-BJP ruled Southern states to bat for the UPA-era rural employment scheme.

The resolution was moved by the Kerala State Parliamentary Affairs Minister M B Rajesh and was passed by the House amidst the opposition Congress-led UDF's protest over the Sabarimala gold loss issue.

The Congress-ruled Karnataka and Telangana, besides Tamil Nadu where the DMK is in power, had earlier adopted Assembly resolutions demanding for the withdrawal of Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) and restore MGNREGA.

Meanwhile, the Enforcement Directorate on Thursday conducted searches in Kerala against the promoters and key functionaries of the Nedumparambil Credit Syndicate Group as part of an alleged investment fraud linked money laundering probe, officials said. The federal probe agency booked a case based on an FIR filed by the state police. —*PTI*

SC orders WB to pay govt employees DA from 2008-19

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

The Supreme Court has directed the West Bengal government to pay dearness allowance (DA) to nearly 20 lakh government employees for the period 2008 to 2019, declaring it a legally enforceable right. A bench of Justices Sanjay Karol and Prashant Kumar Mishra instructed the state to release 25 per cent of the outstanding DA by 6 March. The court stated that once DA is linked to the All-India Consumer Price Index (AICPI) as per statutory rules, the state cannot alter its calculation through later office memoranda.

The court said, "To receive dearness allowance is a legally-enforceable right that has accrued in favour of the respondents-employees of the state of West Bengal.... The employees of the appellant-state shall be entitled to release of arrears in accordance with this judgment for the time 2008-2019." It added that employees are not entitled to DA twice a year. —*PTI*

-PTI

Ahead of Shah's visit, Omar bats for opening tourist spots

JAMMU, 5 FEB

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said that he will raise the issue of closed tourism destinations with Home Minister Amit Shah during his upcoming visit to the Union Territory.

Responding to a supplementary question of Congress MLA Nizam Uddin Bhat, Abdullah on Thursday, said that some tourist destinations are still closed post the Pahalgam terror attack in April last year.

"I believe the time has now come to reopen them. From the government's side, discussions with the Government of India are ongoing. The Home Minister is scheduled to visit Jammu and Kashmir in the coming days, and I assure the House, and especially the MLA from Bandipora, that this issue will certainly be discussed with him," the Chief Minister, who also holds the tourism portfolio, said.

Nearly 50 tourist destinations were shut down by the LG administration after terrorists shot dead 26 tourists at Baisaran in the Pahalgam area on April 22 last year. However, over a dozen destinations reopened in September, but many others remain closed. The process of revising the Jammu and Kashmir Tourist Trade Rules was being undertaken. —*PTI*

'MOHAMMAD DEEPAK' REJECTS JHARKHAND'S RS 2 LAKH REWARD

KOTDWAR, 5 FEB

Gym owner Deepak Kumar, known online as "Mohammed Deepak", said he was unprepared for the national attention he received after confronting Bajrang Dal activists who were pressuring a 70-year-old Muslim shopkeeper to change his shop's name.

The 28 January, incident turned heated when Kumar sarcastically gave his name as "Mohammed Deepak", a moment that later went viral on social media. While police registered cases against the protesters, an FIR was also filed against Kumar.

The 42-year-old has declined a Rs 2 lakh reward announced by a Jharkhand minister. —*PTI*

SPARKS ROW

North Indians know only Hindi, sell pani puri: TN Minister

CHENNAI, 5 FEB

Tamil Nadu Agriculture Minister MRK Panneerselvam triggered a row with remarks linking migrant workers from northern states to menial jobs and defending the state's two-language policy before the Assembly election.

Speaking at a public event, Panneerselvam said people from the north who "have learnt only Hindi" have limited job opportunities in Tamil Nadu and often end up in low-paying roles, while students from the state benefit from learning Tamil and English.

His comments quickly drew criticism from opposition leaders and parties outside the state, who termed them insensitive and divisive.

Leaders from the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) attempted damage control. Party spokesperson Syed Hafeezullah said there is "dignity in every legal work" and stressed that the party is not against Hindi speakers or the jobs they do. He reframed the minister's remarks as a defence of the state's two-language policy and its emphasis on English for global opportunities.

- DMK spokesperson Syed Hafeezullah said there is "dignity in every legal work" and that the party is not against Hindi speakers or the jobs they do.

DMK Lok Sabha MP TR Baalu claimed the Minister had been misquoted and said nothing derogatory against north Indians.

Congress MP Karti Chidambaram said Tamil Nadu's economy depends significantly on migrant labour from other states and that such workers are welcome and safe in the state.

Samajwadi Party MP Awadhesh Prasad described the statement as an insult to north Indians. The row comes amid a renewed debate over the Centre's three-language formula under the National Education Policy, which Tamil Nadu opposed. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

One more held for firing at Rohit Shetty's house

MUMBAI, 5 FEB

Police have arrested one more person in connection with the firing at filmmaker Rohit Shetty's residence in Mumbai. The accused, Asaram Fasale, a resident of Pune, was apprehended by the Mumbai police. He is suspected to have provided the weapon to the shooter. Five persons have so far been taken into custody, while the search for the shooter was underway. At least five rounds were fired at the first floor of Shetty's nine-storey building in Mumbai's Juhu area on 1 February. One bullet struck the glass of a gym located in the building. Fasale was produced in court later in the day along with the other four accused. —PTI

Mahout drowns after elephant hits him with its trunk

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, 5 FEB

A 27-year-old mahout drowned at Kerala's Kottoor elephant rehabilitation centre near Neyyar Dam. The incident occurred at 9.40am when he was bathing the elephant. The jumbo hit him with its trunk, pushing him into the water, leading to his drowning. Despite being rushed to hospital, he was declared dead. The victim had worked at the centre for several years. —PTI

TTD laddu row: Panel to take corrective action

AMRAVATI, 5 FEB

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday announced the setting up of a one-man committee to take corrective measures into the alleged ghee adulteration of the laddu served in the Tirumala Temple. Even a 2022 Central Food Technological Research Institute report when the YSRCP was in power clearly stated there was adulteration, he said. Chandrababu Naidu said as part of the "cleansing process" of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, ghee samples were sent to NDDB-CALF, which stated that it was adulterated with animal fat. —PTI

Elephant herd kills 3 of family in Jharkhand

BOKARO, 5 FEB

A herd of five elephants killed three family members in Jharkhand's Bokaro district. The incident occurred at Barkipunnu village around 3am when elephants attacked their house, damaging part of it. The victims tried to escape but were trampled outside. The elephant herd had been roaming in the area. Compensation proceedings have been initiated. On 18 January, a vegetable dealer was killed by elephants in the same area. —PTI

Jan Suraaj Party moves SC challenging Bihar polls

NDA swept polls while Jan Suraaj couldn't win even 1 seat

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Former poll strategist Prashant Kishor's Jan Suraaj Party has moved the Supreme Court challenging the Bihar Assembly Elections, 2025, and sought fresh polls in the state.

The matter is likely to come up for hearing on Friday before a bench of the Chief Justice of India, Surya Kant, and Joymalya Bagchi.

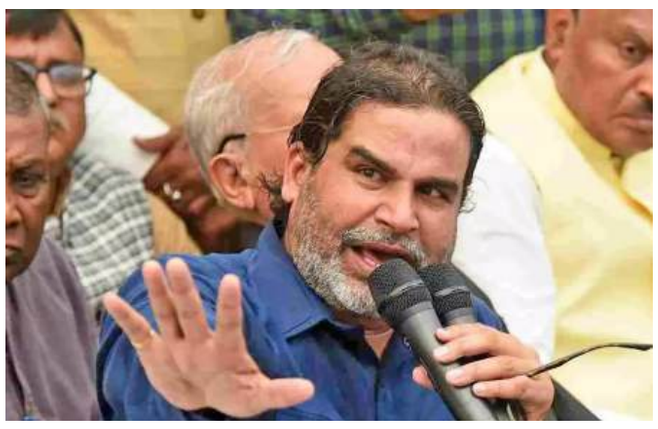
The BJP-led NDA retained power in the state, winning 202 of 243 seats, while INDIA bagged only 35, including six of the Congress.

The Jan Suraaj Party failed to open its account in the Assembly polls, and most of its candidates lost their deposits.

The party has accused the Bihar government of violating the Model Code by transferring Rs 10,000 each to women under the Mukhyamantri Mahila Rojgar Yojana after the announcement of the poll schedule.

The petition has sought directions to the poll panel to take action under Article 324 of the Constitution (superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, all elections) and Section 123 of the Representation of People Act against direct transfer of money to women voters in the state.

The Mukhyamantri Mahila Rojgar Yojana provides an initial grant of Rs 10,000 to women to launch small businesses. —PTI



Jan Suraaj Party leader Prashant Kishor who is also a former election strategist speaks at a function in Patna —PTI

Widespread violence during SIR in West Bengal: ECI

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

The ECI told the SC that the SIR of electoral rolls in West Bengal was marked by violence and obstruction of election officials. It said that the 2025 electoral rolls cannot be used for the assembly polls as over 58 lakh absent, dead and shifted voters had been identified and that around 1.51 crore notices were being issued. The ECI affidavit says that the police was "reluctant" to register cases based on BLOs' complaints by BLOs and that FIRs were registered only after the intervention of election officers. —PTI

SC to hear wife's plea on Wangchuk's arrest on 9 Feb

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

The Supreme Court today adjourned to 9 February the hearing on a plea filed by Gitanjali J Angmo, the wife of jailed climate activist Sonam Wangchuk, against his detention under the National Security Act.

A bench of Justices Aravind Kumar and PB Varale deferred the matter.

On Wednesday, the court had asked the Centre if there was any possibility for the government to relook the detention of Wangchuk considering his health. —PTI

SC to hear PIL against poll freebies

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

The Supreme Court today agreed to list for hearing in March a PIL seeking a direction to seize the symbol or deregister a political party that promises or distributes "irrational freebies" before polls.

Lawyer-petitioner Ashwini Updhyaya told Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi that the notices on his PIL were issued to the Centre and the Election Commission in 2022 itself, and urged it to list the matter soon.

"This is an important issue. We will list in March," the CJI said. On 25 January 2022, a bench headed by the then Chief Justice N V Ramana had sought replies from the Centre and the EC on the PIL seeking a direction to seize to a party that promises "irrational freebies." —PTI

NO CHARGE SHEET FILED

Unnikrishnan Potty got bail in the case pertaining to the loss of gold from the door frames of the temple's sanctum sanctorum —ANI

Prime accused Potty gets bail in Sabarimala case

KOLLAM, 5 FEB

A court here on Thursday granted statutory bail to Unnikrishnan Potty in the second case connected to the Sabarimala gold loss incident.

Kollam Vigilance Court Judge Mohit C S granted bail to Potty in the case pertaining to the loss of gold from the door frames of the Sreekovil (sanctum sanctorum).

The bail was granted as the SIT probing the case failed to file a charge sheet within 90 days of Potty's arrest, making him eligible for statutory bail.

Potty had earlier been granted statutory bail in the case connected to the loss of gold from the Dwarapalaka (guardian deity) idol plates. With bail granted in both cases, Potty will be released from jail.

He is the first accused in both cases and becomes the fourth arrested person to be released from custody in the incident.

It was Potty who had approached the Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) seeking permission for re-plating the gold-clad artefacts, which was later approved in 2019.

The artefacts were subsequently taken to Smart Creations, a Chennai-based firm, where the gold plating was carried out.

The SIT has claimed that gold was diverted from the artefacts during the re-plating process.

The court also extended the remand of Tantri (chief priest) Kandararu Rajeevaru, who was produced through video conferencing.

Rajeevaru has filed a bail petition, which will be considered on 9 February.

Meanwhile, former TDB Thiruvabharanam Commissioner K S Baiju has approached the Vigilance Court seeking statutory bail in both cases. His bail petition will be considered on 11 February. — PTI

Diary of Ghaziabad girls shows Korean obsession

GHAZIABAD, 5 FEB

A nine-page pocket diary recovered from the room of the three minor sisters who committed suicide in Ghaziabad has offered a glimpse into their world, marked by an intense attachment to the Korean culture and anguish over family strife, police said.

The police probing the suicide case in Bharat City Society here said that initial investigations haven't revealed the use of any Korean task-based app by the girls. The police also said if the use of any such task-based Korean app is confirmed, they will write to the department concerned seeking a ban on such apps.

After the sisters, Nishika, 16, Prachi, 14, and Pakhi, 12, jumped to death from the ninth floor, their father Chetan Kumar claimed they had been playing a Korean game for around three years and had not attended school since then.

After the autopsy, their bodies were cremated at Delhi's Nigam Bodh Ghat on Wednesday.

Police said the diary contains repeated references to the girls' love for Korea and what they described as attempts by the family to make them give it up. The note alleges that their parents were opposed to their interests and marriage choices.

"You tried to make us give up Korean. Korean was our life... You expected our marriage to an Indian, that can never happen," the diary says.

It also mentions physical punishment and ends with an apology addressed to their father. "Death is better for us than your beatings. That is why we are committing suicide... Sorry Papa." — PTI

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support

NMC TOLD TO FRAME POLICY

Prohibition on transfer of medical student invalid: HC

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

The Delhi High Court has ruled that the total prohibition on the transfer or migration of a medical student from one college to another is invalid, and directed the National Medical Commission to formulate a "proper policy" to permit migration while putting in place conditions.

Chief Justice D K Upadhyaya and Justice Tejas Karia said Regulation 18 of the Graduate Medical Education Regulation, 2023, was against the Constitution as it was "unreasonable and arbitrary."

The bench passed the verdict while dealing with a petition by a medical student, having 40 per cent visual impairment, who sought his migration from Government Medical College, Barmer to a college in Delhi.

— PTI

Granting relief, the court directed the NMC to take a decision within three weeks on the petitioner's request seeking transfer.

The court observed that the NMC's stand that migration was prone to misuse could not be sustained as possibility of abuse could not be used to deny legitimate rights to a citizen.

It noted that the medical condition of the petitioner were worsening on account of the harsh climate in Barmer and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (PwD Act) mandated public bodies to ensure that persons with disabilities were provided "reasonable accommodation" and "appropriate environment." —PTI

Police seize explosives from van in Palakkad

PALAKKAD, 5 FEB

Police seized a van carrying a large quantity of explosives near Palakkad town in Kerala, officials said on Thursday.

An officer from the Palakkad Town South police station said around 100 boxes of gelatin sticks and over 20 boxes of detonators were recovered.

The explosives had been concealed under watermelons. The seizure was made on Wednesday.

The driver of the van was taken into custody for questioning. During preliminary interrogation, he told police that the explosives were loaded in Coimbatore and were being transported to a quarry in Thrissur.

Police said the vehicle was intercepted after receiving specific information that a large quantity of explosives was being illegally brought into the state. When signalled to stop, the driver attempted to flee, prompting officers to chase and stop the van.

The police said a case will be registered under the Explosive Substances Act once the seizure process is completed. Further investigation is under way to determine whether others were involved and to verify the source and intended use of the explosives. — PTI

Indian mission denies attack on Sri Lankan fishermen

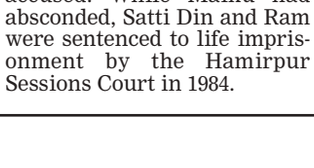
COLOMBO, 5 FEB

The Indian High Commission here today denied the alleged attack on a group of Sri Lankan fishermen by the Indian Coast Guard.

The Indian High Commission said it had noticed media reports pertaining to the alleged assault on Sri Lankan fishermen at sea on 29 January 2026.

On 2 February, the Sri Lankan fisheries minister Ramalingam Chandra sekeran said a protest will be be recorded with the Indian government regarding the incident.

He said the Indian High Commission has been informed on the incident by them.



— PTI

On 29 January, three trawlers with 12 fishermen had ventured out for fishing from the Wellamankaraya fishing harbour at Wennappuva. They were allegedly attacked by Indian Coast Guards.

The Lankan Navy deployed a vessel to bring ashore four fishermen who had been badly injured by the assault.

Another naval craft was moved to bring back six more injured fishermen, the Naval spokesman Buddika Sampath said.

Tyronne Mendis, an official of the fishermen's association said, "Three trawlers had come under attack. Two of them were within Lankan waters." — PTI

Javad Ahmad Siddiqui was arrested based on an UGC complaint —PTI

Al Falah varsity chairman arrested in forgery case

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

The Crime Branch of Delhi Police has arrested Javad Ahmad Siddiqui, chairman of Al Falah University, in connection with two FIRs registered on a complaint by the University Grants Commission (UGC), an official said.

The cases relate to alleged irregularities and forgery in the functioning of the private university, which came under investigation following a blast near the Red Fort in Del

The arrest was made after the Enforcement Directorate (ED) initiated proceedings in the matter. Siddiqui was produced before a local court, which granted four days of police custody for further questioning. Further details are awaited. — PTI

RELIEF AT LAST

Allahabad High Court sets free 100-yr-old man after 4 decades

PRAYAGRAJ, 5 FEB

The Allahabad High Court has acquitted a nearly 100-year-old man accused of murder, more than four decades after he challenged his life imprisonment and was granted bail. The court noted that the social consequences faced by the accused could not be ignored in granting relief.

A division bench comprising Justices Chandra Dhari Singh and Sanjiv Kumar stated that the lengthy pendency of the appeal and the age of the accused, Dhami Ram, were relevant considerations when moulding relief. The murder occurred in 1982 over a land dispute, with three individuals – Maiku, Satti Din, and Dhani Ram – named as accused. While Maiku had absconded, Satti Din and Ram were sentenced to life imprisonment by the Hamirpur Sessions Court in 1984.

— PTI

Ram was released on bail the same year. Satti Din died during the appeal, leaving Ram as the sole appellant. The court noted that Ram had been on bail since then. It directed that his bail bond be discharged and held that his acquittal was based on the merits of the case, specifically noting the prosecution's failure to prove the charges.

The division bench also emphasised that the social consequences experienced by Ram could not be ignored while assessing what justice now demands. Ram's counsel stated that the appellant is about 100 years old and that he had only asked Maiku to fire at the victim. — PTI

Mumbai varsity cancels invite to Naseeruddin

MUMBAI, 5 FEB

Veteran actor Naseeruddin Shah has claimed he was disinvited at the last minute from a Mumbai University event organised by the Urdu department, without explanation or apology.

He linked the incident to his political stance, saying that he has never praised 'Vishwaguru.'

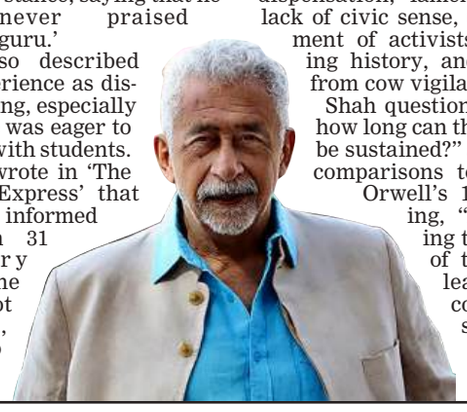
He also described the experience as disappointing, especially since he was eager to engage with students.

Shah wrote in 'The Indian Express' that he was informed late on 31 January that he need not attend, with no reason given.

The university later told the audience he had refused to attend, which Shah dismissed, challenging anyone to produce a statement where he criticised his country.

He linked the snub to his outspoken views, stating he has often criticised the ruling dispensation, lamenting the lack of civic sense, the treatment of activists, rewriting history, and threats from cow vigilantes.

Shah questioned, "Just how long can this hatred be sustained?" and drew comparisons to George Orwell's 1984, saying, "not singing the praise of the 'great leader' is considered sedition." —PTI



A KISS OF THE SUN

Midday sunshine falls on a hibiscus flower after the sun breaks through in Bengaluru on Thursday —MOHAMMED ASAD

Ghaziabad horror triggers gaming addiction alarm

Limited social interaction, blurring of lines between reel and real, addictive online gaming… the toxic cocktail can lead to an alternate reality prompting adolescents in particular to walk the dark path that can end in suicide.

Is that what happened in Ghaziabad where three sisters - aged 16, 14 and 12 – who died by suicide on Wednesday?

Investigations pointed to their addiction to an online Korean game involving a series of tasks. Their father Chetan Kumar said they had been playing the game for close to three years and had not attended school since then. And a pocket diary offered a glimpse into their inner world, marked by intense attachment to Korean culture and anguish over family strife.

It also mentions physical punishment and ends with an apology: "Death is better for us then your beatings. That is why we are committing suicide... Sorry Papa."

According to Vandana Prakash, clinical psychologist and senior consultant at Max Superspeciality Hospital, Vaishali, apart from consuming time and resources, online gaming addiction can keep individuals away from meaningful activities like school, office and outdoor games.

"Lack of productive life and away from real world often has effect on the person's mental health, making them suicidal," Prakash said.

As the apparent suicide pact put the spotlight on the severe effects of online gaming addiction and the increasing craze for Korean popular culture among youth, other mental health experts also expressed their concern.

Forensic psychologist Deepti Puranik said adolescents associate themselves with their gamer identities and taking that away can lead to drastic results.

Any addiction can be looked at in terms of the brain responding to a reward system, she added.

"Games give pleasure to these kids through rewards. Gaming directly may not cause an individual to take extreme steps, but it can lead to a lot of these factors that can make an individual's life chaotic and uncontrollable," the Mumbai-based psychologist told PTI.

Police said the sisters took the extreme step after their parents objected to their excessive use of mobile phones. Their obsession with Korean popular culture became clearer with their diary details and further police investigations.

Unaware of the nature of the "Korean Love Game" his children were addicted to, Kumar said he later learned that the game involved instructions which the children followed.

The father also said the girls would often say they wanted to go to Korea. According to clinical psychologist Shweta Sharma, the fascination for Korean pop culture in young children arises from the emotional unavailability of parents.

"We are providing children with all the facilities without understanding whether they are able to handle it or not. So that emotional need is not getting fulfilled.

"In Korean culture, if you see any series, any game or whatsoever they are making, they are made mostly on the basis of friendship, love and belonging," the expert said.

Sharma's argument found echo in an incident from 2024, when three school girls from a village in Maharashtra decided to travel to Korea to meet their favourite Korean band BTS.

"For them, that was their reality. And you are actually trying to attempt, or you are separating them from their real world. For them, it is more real from the actual reality. For them, the real versus reel is a basic challenge," Sharma explained.

Discussing increasing instances of gaming addiction among the youth, she said children start out in such games with a "curiosity to prove something under peer pressure".

"At each stage of the game, there is constant need to prove yourself. So, usually, these children cannot understand proper emotional regulation. They have a strong need to be seen, need to be acknowledged." She added that adolescents don't have a fully developed prefrontal cortex that is responsible for complex, high-level cognitive processes, including decision-making, personality expression and impulse control.

"The addiction level is high in this age group because they are still under development. They can't differentiate between reality and perception," she said.

On the same day the Ghaziabad sisters ended their lives, a 14-year-old boy in Bhopal allegedly died by suicide in the city with his family members suspecting that his addiction to a mobile game was responsible.

The tragedies recalled the 2017 Blue Whale challenge. The deadly 50-day challenge, which was believed to have originated in Russia, claimed over 130 lives across Russia and the Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The game reportedly consisted of a series of tasks assigned to players by administrators over a 50-day period. Starting innocuously, administrators would gradually introduce challenges involving self-harm before the final challenge requiring the player to commit suicide. —PTI

SALAR ساہر

'High nitrogen dioxide levels choked Delhi in Jan'

Delhi's air in January was choked not only by particulate matter but also by elevated levels of nitrogen dioxide, cancer-causing benzene and other toxic pollutants, with an analysis of official air quality data showing widespread breaches of safe limits across multiple monitoring stations in the capital.

The analysis by EnviroCatalysts, an independent research body, based on monthly average air quality data till 25 January, showed that nitrogen dioxide exceeded the recommended limits for more than 25 days at most stations in January, even though some locations recorded lower concentrations compared to the same month last year.

The analysis also showed that levels of benzene, a known carcinogen, exceeded the World Health Organisation's (WHO) guidelines that say that no amount of benzene exposure is considered safe, on 24 days in January.

Long-term exposure to benzene is associated with an increased risk of leukaemia and other blood cancers.

The data also showed that benzene crossed the Indian annual standard of five micrograms per cubic metre on one day this January.

In comparison, during the same period last year, benzene levels breached the WHO guidelines on 28 days but did not exceed the Indian standard on any day.

EnviroCatalysts is an environmental research organisation with a focus on data-driven solutions for air pollution, energy transition, and industrial decarbonisation.

Under the WHO guidelines, nitrogen dioxide should not exceed 25 micrograms per cubic metre over 24 hours, while the Indian National Ambient Air Quality Standards prescribe a higher limit of 80 micrograms per cubic metre for a 24-hour period.

The analysis found that large parts of Delhi continued to record elevated nitrogen dioxide levels through January.

The analysis showed that several locations witnessed steep increases. Burari Crossing recorded 96 micrograms per cubic metre, compared to 15 in January last year; Okhla Phase II saw nitrogen dioxide rise sharply to 108 from 49 a year ago; while Wazirpur emerged as the worst-affected station, recording 135 micrograms per cubic metre, up from 84.

The other areas with elevated levels, according to the analysis, included Mandir Marg at 93 compared to 100 last year, Jahangirpuri at 86 compared to 55, Najafgarh at 77 compared to 52, and North Campus, Delhi University, at 70 compared to 43 last year.

The data also showed that the IGI airport's Terminal-3 recorded 62, compared to 45 a year ago, IHBS Dilshad Garden 56 compared to 30, NSIT Dwarka 52 compared to 35, while Pusa recorded 71 compared to 47 in the same period last year.

However, Alipur recorded 37 micrograms per cubic metre, down from 57 micrograms per cubic metre in January last year.

According to the analysis, Anand Vihar recorded 38, down from 79, while Ashok Vihar saw 52, compared to 60 earlier. Aya Nagar recorded 34, down from 41, and Bawana recorded 22, compared to 33 last year.

While the central and residential areas showed relative improvement, the analysis noted that they remained above the safe thresholds on most days.

According to the study, ITO recorded 51 micrograms per cubic metre as compared to 100 last year, Lodhi Road recorded 32 against 94, Punjabi Bagh 39 compared to 61, Rohini 36 compared to 55, Siri Fort 26 against 33, while Sonia Vihar recorded 37 compared to 47 in the year-ago period.

Overall, around 39 per cent of the monitoring stations recorded higher nitrogen dioxide levels in January compared to last year, even as the others showed a decline, the analysis said.

The analysis showed that nitrogen dioxide levels crossed the safe limits on more than 25 days this January, though lower than last year, when all 31 days of the month breached the standard.

The other gaseous pollutants showed mixed trends, the analysis found.

Carbon monoxide breached Indian standards on three days in January, compared to no breaches during the same period last year.

The carbon monoxide standard is assessed on an eight-hour basis, unlike the 24-hour standard applied to several other pollutants.

Sulphur dioxide, ozone and ammonia remained within the prescribed limits throughout the month.

According to the study, other sources contributed 28.6 per cent to the overall pollution load, with Delhi's transport sector alone accounting for 15.1 per cent, making vehicles the single-largest identified contributor.

Experts cited in the analysis attributed the pollution to vehicular emissions, industrial activity and power plants, road dust and construction, biomass and waste burning, and the use of solid fuels and diesel generator sets in households and commercial establishments. Health experts quoted in the analysis warned that prolonged exposure to these pollutants can damage the lungs and heart, aggravate asthma, increase the risk of respiratory infections, heart attacks and strokes, and, in the case of benzene, raise long-term cancer risks. —PTI

The data also showed that benzene crossed the Indian annual standard of five micrograms per cubic metre on one day this January —PTI

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

US Project Vault challenges China's rare mineral dominance

A flurry of announcements this week has underscored a renewed push by the United States and the European Union to reduce their dependence on China for rare earths and other critical minerals — key building blocks of next-generation technology.

US President Donald Trump on Monday unveiled Project Vault, a sweeping initiative to establish a strategic American stockpile of critical minerals, expand domestic processing capacity and secure long-term supply agreements with manufacturers.A day later, the European Union outlined plans for a transatlantic rare-earth alliance with Washington, while US Vice President JD Vance used a global summit on Wednesday to promote the idea of a rare-earth trading bloc among allied nations. Rare earths — alongside lithium, cobalt and copper — are essential for electric vehicles, artificial intelligence, robotics, renewable energy and defence systems. Control over their supply has increasingly become a geopolitical flashpoint.

WHAT IS PROJECT VAULT?

Project Vault is the Trump administration's flagship effort to stockpile more than 50 critical minerals, including rare earth elements. Speaking at the White House on Monday, Trump said US companies had "for years risked running out of critical minerals during market disruptions".

The initiative will establish a US Strategic Critical Minerals Reserve, backed by a $10 billion loan from the Export-Import Bank of the United States (EXIM), with up to a further $2 billion expected from private investors. EXIM's president, John Jovanovic, said the project created a public-private partnership "uniquely suited to put America's best foot forward". More than a dozen major companies have already signed on, including General Motors, Stellantis, Boeing, GE Vernova and Google. Bloomberg News reported that three commodities trading houses have agreed to handle raw-material purchases. Officials say Project Vault will shield US manufacturers from supply-chain shocks by keeping mineral-price risks off company balance sheets and ensuring a 60-day reserve in case of emergencies. At current market prices, the programme's $12 billion budget would be sufficient to buy every gram of critical minerals used outside China in a year.

WHY NOW?

Project Vault is designed to counter China's longstanding dominance in rare earths, which Beijing has repeatedly used as geopolitical leverage. China currently produces around two-thirds of the world's rare earths and refines nearly 90 per cent of them, giving it effective control over global supply.

During last year's tariff war with Washington, Beijing twice imposed export controls on rare earths, only easing them as tensions subsided. The moves triggered immediate shortages and production delays for US and European manufacturers, underlining how quickly China can weaponise its market power. China has deployed this strategy before. In 2010, it abruptly halted rare-earth exports to Japan during a diplomatic dispute, causing prices to spike and disrupting global supply chains. US officials say the new mineral reserve is modelled on the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, created after the 1970s oil crisis, when an Arab embargo sent oil prices soaring and exposed America's vulnerability to external shocks.

The initiative also fits into a broader effort to harden US supply chains. Over the past year, the Pentagon has spent nearly $5 billion securing access to critical minerals, while a bipartisan group of lawmakers last month proposed creating a new agency with $2.5 billion to boost domestic production.

EUROPE'S ROLE

The EU faces many of the same vulnerabilities. Europe has almost no rare-earth refining capacity and relies heavily on Chinese processors for permanent magnets used in wind turbines, electric vehicles and fighter jets. Under the EU's Critical Raw Materials Act, Brussels has set non-binding targets for domestic extraction, processing and recycling. New funding is being directed towards projects in Sweden, Finland and Greenland — part of the Kingdom of Denmark — which host some of Europe's most promising rare-earth deposits.

Greenland, in particular, has attracted growing attention despite its non-EU status, a fact Trump recently referenced when he again floated the idea of bringing the island under US control. Several European firms, including Germany's Vacuumschmelze, are expanding permanent-magnet production, potentially offering the continent its first scalable alternative to Chinese supply. Following Brussels' proposal this week for a transatlantic rare-earth alliance, the US Trade Representative confirmed that Washington would partner with the EU and Japan to "mitigate critical supply chain vulnerabilities".

BUILDING A RARE-EARTH BLOC

On Wednesday, representatives from 55 countries gathered at the US State Department in Washington for a summit on critical minerals. Participants included EU member states, Japan, South Korea, Canada and Germany, alongside major or emerging suppliers such as Australia, India and Thailand.

Several African nations, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, were also present, reflecting their importance as suppliers of other critical minerals. Addressing delegates, Vance said the US wanted to build a rare-earth "trading bloc" among allies that would guarantee access while expanding production across participating countries. The proposed bloc would seek to regulate minimum prices to prevent China from flooding markets with cheap exports and undercutting competitors.

"Investment is nearly impossible so long as prices are erratic and unpredictable," Vance said. —*DW News*

PHOTO: X

Imran's sons accuse Pak govt of denying visa

LAHORE, 5 FEB

The sons of former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan accused the Shehbaz Sharif government of deliberately denying them visas to visit their father, calling democracy "hollow" and human rights "crushed." Khan has been imprisoned since August 2023 in Adiala Jail. His sons, Suleman and Kasim Khan, who live in London, say they are trying to travel to see him. Kasim stated, "My brother and I are trying to travel to Pakistan to see our father. For 914 days, he has been held in solitary confinement while his health deteriorates and he is denied access to independent medical care. Now the government is deliberately refusing to process our visas. Denying a prisoner treatment is cruel. Denying his children the right to see him is collective punishment." —*PTI*

Pak Army puts Baloch violence toll at 274

ISLAMABAD, 5 FEB

At least 216 terrorists, 36 civilians, and 22 security personnel were killed during a days-long Pakistan Army operation in Balochistan, officials said on Thursday. The offensive, codenamed Radd-ul-Fitna-1, was launched on 26 January, following verified intelligence on terrorist hideouts. The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said the operation successfully disrupted terrorist networks. The statement alleged involvement of "Indian-sponsored elements," which India has denied. Rail services resumed after five days of disruption from attacks. Balochistan, bordering Iran and Afghanistan, remains affected, with militants previously targeting strategic projects, including the $60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. —*PTI*

Malaysia bans import, dumping of e-waste

KUALALUMPUR, 5 FEB

Malaysia has announced an immediate and total ban on the import of electronic waste, saying the country will not become a dumping ground for the world's waste. The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) said all e-waste has been reclassified under the "absolute prohibition" category, ending the Environment Department's authority to grant import exemptions. MACC chief Azam Baki said e-waste is no longer permitted and warned of strict, coordinated enforcement to stop illegal shipments. Malaysia has faced large volumes of imported e-waste in recent years, much of it hazardous and suspected to be illegal. The move comes as authorities widen a corruption probe into e-waste management, with senior environment officials detained and assets seized. —*PTI*

Nigeria to set up military command after 162 killed

LAGOS, 5 FEB

Nigeria announced a new military operation after at least 162 people were killed in a Muslim-majority villages in Kwara state. No group has claimed responsibility, but such attacks are often linked to Boko Haram or Islamic State–affiliated Lakurawa. Local officials said gunmen razed homes and looted shops, one of the deadliest attacks outside known conflict hotspots. The presidency said villagers were targeted for rejecting extremist indoctrination. President Bola Tinubu ordered the deployment of a Nigerian army battalion to Kaiama, which has had limited security presence. The new military command will lead Operation Savannah Shield to counter militants and protect communities. —*PTI*

Fears of arms race as US, Russia nuke treaty ends

World will be in greater danger than ever, warns Kremlin

MOSCOW, 5 FEB

The last remaining nuclear arms pact between Russia and the United States expired on Thursday, removing any caps on the two largest atomic arsenals for the first time in over half a century.

The termination of the the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) could set the stage for what many fear could be an unconstrained nuclear arms race.

Russian President Vladimir Putin last year declared readiness to stick to the treaty's limits for another year if Washington follows suit, but US President Donald Trump has been noncommittal. In December, Trump said, "If it expires, it expires... We'll just do a better agreement".

Putin discussed the pact's expiration with Chinese leader Xi Jinping on Wednesday, Kremlin adviser Yuri Ushakov said.

Russia "will act in a balanced and responsible manner based on thorough analysis of the security situation," Ushakov said.

The Kremlin said that the US hadn't responded to their requests to extend the pact.

Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said: "We view the expiration of the treaty negatively and express our regret".

Russia's Foreign Ministry on Wednesday night said in a statement that "we assume that the parties are no longer bound by any obligations... and are fundamentally free to choose their next steps."

New START, signed in 2010 by then-president Barack Obama and his Russian counterpart, Dmitry Medvedev, restricted each side to no more than 1,550 nuclear warheads on no more than 700 missiles and bombers — deployed and ready for use. It was originally supposed to expire in 2021 but was extended for five more years.

New START followed a long succession of US-Russian nuclear arms reduction pacts. Those have been terminated, as well. —*AGENCIES*

> This.... could not come at a worse time – the risk of a nuclear weapon being used is the highest in decades
>
> —Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary General

Argentina seeks Maduro's extradition over rights abuse

An Argentine judge on Wednesday requested Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro's extradition from the US, accusing him in a warrant of crimes against humanity during his several crackdowns. Maduro is currently in a New York jail after the US military arrested him. Argentina has pursued human rights cases beyond its borders in the past. The plaintiffs include Venezuelans who suffered torture.

Man gets lifer for trying to kill Don at Florida golf course

Ryan Routh, convicted of trying to assassinate Trump on a Florida golf course in 2024 was sentenced to life in prison. District Judge Aileen Cannon sentenced him after his defence attorney argued that he did not pull the trigger. The judge noted Routh's arrest history and said the crime was unacceptable.

Khamenei should be worried: Trump ahead of Oman talks

DUBAI, 5 FEB

US President Donald Trump sent a blunt warning to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei ahead of the nuclear talks between Tehran and Washington scheduled to take place in Oman on Friday.

"He should be very worried," Trump said. He said that Iran was looking to rebuild its nuclear facilities, which the US and Israel bombed in June. Trump claimed at the time that all the nuclear sites and facilities were decimated. On Wednesday, Trump claimed that if the US didn't intervene, there wouldn't be "peace in the Middle East."

"They were thinking about starting a new site in a different part of the country," Trump claimed. "We found out about it, I said, you do that, we're going to do very bad things to you."

The talks in Muscat will feature dozens of leaders from the region to provide perspective, as the US has deployed a massive aircraft carrier in the Gulf, flanked by naval destroyers.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the US hoped to discuss a number of concerns beyond the nuclear issue, including discussions on Iran's ballistic missiles, support for proxy networks across the region and the "treatment of their own people."

Iran has repeatedly said that any curbs on its ballistic missile arsenal, one of the largest in the region, is a red line.

Rubio added that the talks doesn't legitimise the regime. "The leadership of Iran at the clerical level does not reflect the people of Iran," Rubio stated. —*AGENCIES*

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei -*X @KHAMENEI_IR*

- Trump says that if the US didn't intervene, there wouldn't be "peace in the Middle East, because the Arab countries could have never done that."

US ties solid: Taiwan Prez post Xi's warning

TAIPEI, 5 FEB

Taiwan's ties with the US are "rock solid," President Lai Ching-te said on Thursday, hours after his American and Chinese counterparts Donald Trump and Xi Jinping spoke on the phone.

Xi and Trump spoke on a range of issues, including Taiwan and Iran. According to the Chinese Foreign Ministry readout of the call, Xi told Trump to be "prudent" about supplying arms to Taiwan that Beijing claims as its own. Xi also "emphasised that the Taiwan question is the most important issue in China-US relations," adding that China "will never allow Taiwan to be separated".

In December, the US State Department announced its largest-ever arms sales package to Taiwan, valued at more than $11.1 billion. It included missiles, artillery systems and drones. The package is yet to be approved by Congress. China reacted angrily by conducting two days of military drills around the island in December.

"The relationship is rock solid, and all cooperation projects will continue," Lai Ching-te told reporters during a visit to textile merchants in Taiwan.

Trump described his call with Xi as "excellent" and said he was looking forward to his China trip in April. —*PTI*

Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami rally with a large turnout of women supporters, as the party pledges to include women in the Cabinet, despite not currently fielding any women candidates -*FB/ BANGLADESH JAMAAT-E-ISLAMI*

Jamaat's manifesto pledges women in B'desh Cabinet

DHAKA, 5 FEB

Bangladesh's main Islamic party Jamaat-e-Islami on Wednesday announced a 41-point manifesto ahead of the planned 12 February elections, pledging to include women in the Cabinet alongside reforms in the justice and economic sectors.

Jamaat's chief Shafiqur Rahman announced the manifesto, which pledged to include a "significant number of women in the Cabinet" if the party was voted to power.

However, the party has not fielded any female candidates.

"The Cabinet will reflect the diversity of the nation by ensuring representation of religious and ethnic communities and other historically under-represented sections of society," the manifesto read.

It also pledged that working hours for women during maternity would be reduced to five per day.

"The strengthening of relations with countries of the Muslim world shall be a key foreign policy priority," the manifesto read.

Other promises include strengthening relations with India and other neighbours based on "mutual respect" and pursuing the Rohingya refugee crisis with the United Nations.

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), headed by Tarique Rahman, son of former prime minister Khaleda Zia, has emerged as the front runner for the election, with Sheikh Hasina's Awami League banned after the mass uprising. Notably, the BNP and Jamaat were once allies, but are now the two main parties contesting the polls.

Meanwhile, BNP has not yet announced its manifesto for the election. —*PTI*

US, Russia to have direct military talks after Ukraine meet

KYIV, 5 FEB

The United States and Russia agreed on Thursday to reestablish high level military-to-military dialogue following a meeting between senior Russian and American military officials in Abu Dhabi, the United States European Command said in a statement.

High level military communication was suspended in 2021, just before Russia's full scale invasion of Ukraine.

The agreement was reached following meetings between Gen Alexus Grynkewich, the Commander of US European Command -- who is also NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe -- and senior Russian and Ukrainian military officials, the statement said.

The channel "will provide a consistent military-to-military contact as the parties continue to work towards a lasting peace," the statement said.

Grynkewich was in the capital of the UAE where talks between American, Russian and Ukrainian officials on ending the war in Ukraine entered a second day as Moscow escalated its attacks on Ukraine's power grid. Ukraine and Russia reached an agreement to exchange 157 prisoners of war from both sides.

US special envoy Steve Witkoff, who was leading the American delegation alongside Jared Kushner, confirmed the deal on X. —*PTI*

ICE AGENTS NEED WARRANTS FOR ARRESTS IN OREGON: US JUDGE

PORTLAND, 5 FEB

US District Judge Mustafa Kasubhai on Wednesday ordered immigration agents in Oregon to stop making warrantless arrests unless there is a risk of escape, issuing a preliminary injunction against the Department of Homeland Security's enforcement practices.

Kasubhai said agents' actions in Oregon were "violent and brutal" and raised due process concerns.

Similar actions, including immigration agents entering private property without a warrant issued by a court, have drawn concerns across the country amid President Donald Trump's mass deportation efforts.

In a memo last week, ICE acting head Todd Lyons concurred that arrests require warrants unless they are likely to escape. —*PTI*

CYBER ATTACKS

US seizes 200 Indian website domains tied to illegal pharmas

NEW YORK, 5 FEB

US federal authorities have seized more than 200 website domains linked to an India-based transnational criminal organisation (TCO) accused of running illegal online pharmacies tied to at least six fatal and four non-fatal overdoses in the US. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) said the seizures was carried out with federal prosecutors under Operation Meltdown.

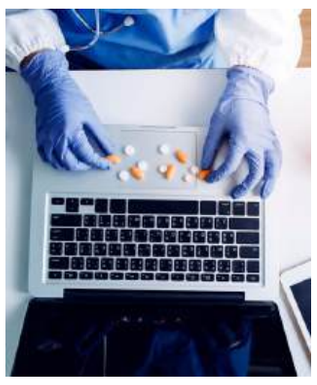
US Authorities said that beginning on 27 January, DEA field offices across the US conducted multiple operations, resulting in the arrest of four individuals, the issuance of five Immediate Suspension Orders (ISOs), and one Order to Show Cause (OTSC).

The DEA said that leveraging its global reach, the agency actively collaborates with the Government of India law enforcement partners to identify, investigate, and dismantle dangerous criminal organisations that engage in these types of illegal drug trafficking operations.

These actions were in addition to the US Government shutting down more than 200 online pharmacies accused of filling hundreds of thousands of orders of diverted pharmaceuticals and counterfeit pills without valid prescriptions.

Investigators found the operators were illegally shipping prescription drugs nationwide, often disguised as legitimate US websites, with counterfeit medications containing fentanyl or methamphetamine that pose serious health risks, including ineffective treatment, harmful side effects, and even death.

Over the course of this investigation, the DEA identified thousands of customers who purchased medication through these online pharmacies. Subsequently, DEA has sent more than 20,000 letters to the public requesting information in support of this ongoing investigation. —*PTI*



-FREEPIK

Syria signs first offshore oil deal with Chevron, Qatar

DAMASCUS, 5 FEB

Syria's state-owned petroleum company signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with US-based Chevron and Qatar's Power International Holding on Wednesday to develop the country's first offshore oil and gas field in Damascus.

The deal marks Syria's first move into offshore energy exploration, SANA said.

Syrian Petroleum Company CEO Youssef Kabalawi called it the country's most important offshore deal, estimating up to four years of drilling to reach gas reserves.

Syria's oil and gas sector, once a key revenue source funding about a quarter of the state budget, was devastated by nearly 15 years of war, and the country's new authorities are now seeking to revive it. In 2010, the country produced about 380,000 barrels a day and exports – mostly to Europe – bringing in more than USD 3 billion. —*PTI*

Tharoor's son among 300 laid off by Washington Post

NEW YORK, 5 FEB

The Washington Post announced widespread layoffs affecting around 300 people, a third of its workforce.

Among those laid off is Ishaan Tharoor, son of Indian politician Shashi Tharoor, who shared heartfelt messages on social media.

Ishaan stated he was "heartbroken" over being laid off along with most of the international staff. He praised his colleagues and the honour of launching the WorldView column in 2017, thanking loyal subscribers. He posted a picture of an empty newsroom, calling it "a bad day."

Other staff, such as Investigative Reporter Will Hobson and Jerusalem bureau chief Gerry Shih, also shared emotional farewell messages. Shih described it as "a privilege to be a Post correspondent," while Cairo bureau chief Claire Parker lamented the loss of her colleagues.

Berlin bureau chief Aaron Wiener and Ukraine correspondent Lizzie Johnson highlighted the impact of losing their jobs amid a challenging reporting environment. The layoffs prompted the Post Guild to call for public support, criticising Jeff Bezos for allegedly depleting the resources. —*ANI*

Ishaan Tharoor, son of politician Shashi Tharoor PHOTO: X/PTI

- IIshaan stated he was "heartbroken" over being laid off along with most of the international staff. He praised his colleagues and thanked loyal subscribers.

Rupee rises 14P to close at 90.33 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 5 FEB

The rupee appreciated 14 paise to close at 90.33 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, on trade deal optimism and overnight decline in commodity prices. The rupee's upside remained capped as investors look for more clarity on the India-US trade deal. Forex traders said significant corporate dollar demand and a weak trend in domestic equities restricted the upside for the rupee. Moreover, investors are awaiting cues from the Reserve Bank of India's monetary policy. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 90.52 and touched an early high of 90.06 and a low of 90.53 against the greenback. The dollar index, was trading 0.29 per cent higher at 97.90. *—PTI*

Sony posts 11% profit rise driven by sensor, games

TOKYO, 5 FEB

Sony's profit in the last quarter surged 11 per cent on healthy global sales, prompting the Japanese electronics and entertainment company to raise its full year profit forecast by 1.13 trillion yen ($7.2 billion). Sony Group Corp. recorded an October-December net profit of 377.3 billion yen ($2.4 billion), up from 341 billion yen the year before. Quarterly sales rose 1% to 3.71 trillion yen ($23.6 billion). Sony's earlier projection stood at 1.05 trillion yen ($6.7 billion). The company's quarterly operating profit improved across almost all of its sprawling businesses, including imaging sensors, games and music. It did not fare as well in movies as the movie 'Venom: The Last Dance' had greatly lifted profits. *—Agencies*

Sun Pharma to invest Rs 500 cr in Assam mfg unit

GUWAHATI, 5 FEB

Leading drug maker Sun Pharmaceutical will invest Rs 500 crore to establish a manufacturing plant in Assam, generating employment for over 500 people, Chief Secretary Ravi Kota said. Senior Vice President of the company, Rahul Awasthi and Associate Vice President Ranjit Mohapatra held a meeting with Kota to discuss various aspects of implementing the project. The company also outlined its focus on sustainable manufacturing practices, including efficient water use, increased adoption of renewable energy and responsible waste management, in line with environmental and regulatory standards. The meeting was part of the Assam government's engagement with prospective investors to promote employment generation, inclusive development and economic growth in the State. *—PTI*

'BharatGen to lock AI models for 22 languages by Feb'

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

The government's sovereign multilingual AI engine BharatGen is expected to complete text-based service by the end of February, Union Minister for Science and Technology Jitendra Singh said on Thursday. The work for developing BharatGen AI is a dynamic process and may add more languages as well as dialects. "We have already completed 15 languages. We will be completing the text of 22 official languages in February. 15 will also have the speech and the vision module," Singh said in the Rajya Sabha. Launched in October 2024, BharatGen is a government project to develop a sovereign AI model providing services like automatic speech recognition (ASR) models and text-to-speech (TTS) models for Indian languages. *—PTI*

Sensex drops 504 points ahead of RBI decision

Global sell-off and sectoral losses dent investor sentiment

MUMBAI, 5 FEB

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty snapped a three-day rally on Thursday, closing sharply lower as investors turned cautious ahead of the Reserve Bank of India's policy decision amid weak global cues and geopolitical uncertainty.

The 30-share BSE Sensex fell 503.76 points, or 0.60 per cent, to settle at 83,313.93, after hitting an intraday low of 83,151.62. The NSE Nifty declined 133.20 points, or 0.52 per cent, to end at 25,642.80.

Heavy selling in metal, IT and capital goods stocks weighed on sentiment. On the BSE, 2,447 stocks declined, while 1,737 advanced and 158 remained unchanged.

Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Investments, said recent gains driven by optimism over a possible US-India trade deal triggered profit booking. He added that fears of a broader global tech sell-off and heightened US-Iran tensions also pushed markets into risk-off mode.

Market focus has now shifted to the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee decision, scheduled to be announced by Governor Sanjay Malhotra on Friday.

Among Sensex stocks, Bharti Airtel, Infosys, Reliance Industries, ICICI Bank and ITC were among the major laggards, while Trent, Tata Steel, SBI and Bajaj Finance gained.

Sectorally, capital goods, metal and IT indices led losses, while PSU banks and oil and gas stocks advanced. Asian markets ended mostly lower, European equities traded weak, and US markets closed mixed overnight.

Analysts said markets may remain range-bound in the near term, with RBI commentary and global risk developments likely to guide the next decisive move. *—PTI*

Bitcoin tumbles 8% as tech stocks lead to a sharp sell-off

BANGKOK, 5 FEB

World markets slid on Thursday as technology stocks led a sharp sell-off, with bitcoin tumbling up to 8 per cent and South Korea's Kospi plunging nearly 4 per cent.

Bitcoin was trading near $71,000 after briefly falling to about $69,000, its lowest level since November 2024, following comments by US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent that he lacked authority to direct banks to buy cryptocurrencies.

Asian markets were broadly weaker, with Japan's Nikkei down 0.9 per cent, Samsung Electronics falling 5.9 per cent and SK Hynix sliding 6.7 per cent. Hong Kong's Hang Seng edged higher, while Shanghai declined.

European markets were mixed and US futures steadied, but analysts said pressure on technology stocks continues to drive volatility across global markets. *—PTI*

AFTER 2 DAY RISE

Gold, silver tumble 10% as strong dollar jitters spark selloff

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Silver and gold prices snapped a two-day rebound and fell sharply in futures trade on Thursday, pressured by weak global cues, heightened volatility and a stronger US dollar, analysts said.

On the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), silver for March delivery plunged Rs 26,850, or 10 per cent, to Rs 2,42,000 per kg, after settling at Rs 2,68,850 per kg in the previous session. Gold for the April contract declined Rs 2,310, or 1.51 per cent, to Rs 1,50,736 per 10 grams, compared with Wednesday's close of Rs 1,53,046 per 10 grams.

"Gold and silver erased recent gains, snapping a two-day rebound as renewed selling pressure and heightened volatility returned to precious-metal markets," Renisha Chainani, head of research at Augmont, said.

The decline mirrored sharp losses in overseas markets. On the Comex, silver for March delivery dropped USD 8.85, or 10.48 per cent, to USD 75.55 per ounce, after sliding over 13 per cent intraday to a low of USD 73.38. "Silver plunged as much as 14 per cent, and the decline appears set to continue after the recent rebound failed to hold," said Jigar Trivedi, senior research analyst at IndusInd Securities.

Comex gold for April delivery also slipped USD 80, or 1.61 per cent, to USD 4,870.9 per ounce, after briefly crossing the USD 5,000 mark in the previous session.

Analysts attributed the sell-off to a stronger dollar amid hawkish signals from the US Federal Reserve and expectations of slower rate cuts, compounded by record outflows from China's gold ETFs. Geopolitical caution ahead of Iran-US talks also weighed on sentiment.

In the near term, analysts expect that the gold and silver prices to remain under pressure and trade in a consolidation phase. *—PTI*

SC upholds NBCC takeover to complete stalled Supertech

- Coming to the rescue of thousands of homebuyers, the Supreme Court on Thursday upheld an NCLAT order directing NBCC to complete 16 stalled housing projects of debt-ridden Supertech Limited.

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Coming to the rescue of thousands of homebuyers, the Supreme Court on Thursday upheld an NCLAT order directing NBCC to complete 16 stalled housing projects of debt-ridden Supertech Limited.

Invoking its extraordinary powers under Article 142, a bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi said protecting homebuyers awaiting delivery for nearly two decades was its foremost consideration.

The court restrained all tribunals and high courts from passing interim orders that could stall construction, and directed NBCC to complete the projects expeditiously with support from an expert committee constituted by the NCLAT.It clarified that financial and operational creditors would be paid only after fully constructed homes, with assured facilities such as water, electricity, sewage, roads and parks, are handed over to buyers.

Upholding the 12 December, 2024 NCLAT order, the bench said NBCC's appointment was neither unfair nor contrary to the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code. The projects cover 49,748 homes across Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Haryana and Karnataka.*—PTI*

AFTER DEC CHAOS

IndiGo shares fall 1% as CCI orders probe over mkt dominance

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

- Shares of InterGlobe Aviation fell nearly 4 per cent in morning trade on Thursday after the Competition Commission of India (CCI) ordered a detailed investigation into alleged unfair business practices by IndiGo.

Shares of InterGlobe Aviation ended nearly 1 per cent lower on Thursday after the Competition Commission of India (CCI) ordered a detailed investigation against IndiGo for unfair business practices.

The stock dropped 3.65 per cent to Rs 4,782.45 during the day on the BSE. It later trimmed most of the early losses and ended at Rs 4,933.95, down 0.60 per cent.

At the NSE, shares of the company ended at Rs 4,932.20, registering a drop of 0.57 per cent. The stock had declined 3.63 per cent to Rs 4,780.30 apiece in intra-day trade.

CCI had ordered a detailed probe against IndiGo two months after it cancelled thousands of flights due to operational issues, causing hardships to passengers.

CCI has prima facie concluded that IndiGo has abused its dominant position based on data related to airlines and those provided by the Director General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).

It said that by cancelling thousands of flights, which constituted a significant portion of the scheduled capacity, IndiGo to a great extent effectively withheld its services from the market.

This has led to creating an artificial scarcity which limiting consumer access to air travel during peak demand of the services. *—PTI*

Airtel profit more than halves to Rs 6,631 cr in Q3

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Bharti Airtel on Thursday reported a sharp drop in profit for the December quarter, even as revenues continued to grow.

The company said consolidated net profit fell 55 per cent year-on-year to Rs 6,630.5 crore in the third quarter ended December 2025, compared with Rs 14,781.2 crore a year earlier.

Revenue from operations rose 19.6 per cent to Rs 53,982 crore from Rs 45,129.3 crore in the year-ago period.

India revenue increased 13.2 per cent to Rs 39,226 crore, while India mobile revenue grew 9.1 per cent, driven by higher realisations and an expanding subscriber base.

Average revenue per user improved 5.7 per cent to Rs 259 during the quarter, up from Rs 245 a year ago, the company said. *—PTI*

5 Tejas jets ready for delivery to IAF: HAL

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

State-run Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) on Thursday said five Tejas light combat aircraft are fully ready for delivery to the Indian Air Force, even as engine supply delays continue to slow inductions.

In February 2021, the defence ministry signed a Rs 48,000 crore contract with HAL to procure 83 Tejas Mk-1A jets. Deliveries have slipped mainly because GE Aerospace missed multiple deadlines for supplying aero engines. "HAL confirms that five aircraft are fully ready for delivery, incorporating major contracted capabilities in line with agreed specifications," a company spokesperson said. She added that nine additional aircraft have already been built and flown, and will be readied for handover once engines are received. All design and development issues identified are being addressed in an "expedited manner," the spokesperson said.

Tejas is a single-engine, multi-role fighter designed for air defence, maritime reconnaissance and strike missions, and for operations in high-threat environments.

HAL said it is in talks with the IAF to accelerate deliveries. "HAL has received five engines from GE so far, and the supply outlook remains positive," the spokesperson said officially.

The IAF is keen to induct the jets as its fighter squadrons have fallen to 30 against an authorised strength of 42. *—PTI*

Global markets overreacted to Anthropic AI tool: Pichai

NEW YORK, 5 FEB

Google CEO Sundar Pichai dismissed the global market selloff triggered by Anthropic's new AI tools as overblown, arguing that artificial intelligence is an enabler rather than a replacement.

Speaking during Google's earnings call, Pichai said AI has long powered products such as Search and YouTube and will similarly help companies "seizing the moment" to create value.

His remarks came after Anthropic's Claude Cowork plugins sparked a sharp selloff in software, legal tech and financial services stocks, wiping out about $285 billion in a single session, a move analysts labelled a "SaaSpocalypse".

Pichai was backed by Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang, who called the selloff "the most illogical thing in the world" at a Cisco event, saying AI will rely on existing software rather than reinvent it.

Markets were rattled particularly by a legal plugin automating contract review and compliance tasks. Thomson Reuters and RELX fell about 15%, LegalZoom nearly 20%, while Infosys ADRs slid 5.5% and Wipro dropped almost 5% eventually. *—Agencies*

Google's quarterly earnings highlight strength in AI era

NEW YORK, 5 FEB

Alphabet's results highlighted Google's strength in the AI era, as advertising and cloud growth helped beat expectations.

October–December marked the third quarter of digital ad growth above 10% year-on-year, alongside 30% growth in AI services.

Alphabet reported a 30% rise in profit to $34.5 billion, or $2.82 per share, while revenue climbed 18% to $113.8 billion.

"Search saw more usage than ever, with AI driving expansion," CEO Sundar Pichai said. Digital ad revenue rose 14% to $82.3 billion and Cloud jumped 48% to $17.7 billion. *—PTI*

BHARAT TAXI TAKES ON OLA, UBER

India gets first cooperative ride-hailing app

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah launches Bharat Taxi in New Delhi on Thursday *–PTI*

Bharat Taxi, India's first cooperative ride-hailing app, was launched on Thursday by Union Cooperation Minister Amit Shah, positioning itself as a driver-owned alternative to platforms such as Ola and Uber.

Rolled out after a two-month pilot, the service has begun operations in Delhi-NCR and Gujarat and is slated to expand across all States and Union Territories within two years.

"In three years, Bharat Taxi will operate nationwide, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and Dwarka to Kamakhya," Shah said, adding that profits generated by the platform would be shared directly with drivers.

Registered under the Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act, 2002, and incorporated on June 6, 2025, Bharat Taxi follows a zero-commission, surge-free pricing model. The app allows bookings for cars, three-wheelers and two-wheelers, entering a market dominated by Uber, Ola and Rapido.

Backed by eight major cooperative organisations, the platform began pilot operations on December 2 in Delhi-NCR and Gujarat. The cooperation ministry described it as the world's largest cooperative-based ride-hailing platform.

Since the pilot launch, over three lakh drivers have joined, more than one lakh users have registered, and about 10,000 rides are completed daily. Officials said around Rs 10 crore has been distributed directly to drivers, alongside social security benefits such as insurance, retirement savings. *—PTI*

Andhra clears Rs 544 cr to acquire 2K acres for port

AMARAVATI, 5 FEB

The Andhra Pradesh government has sanctioned over Rs 500 crore to acquire land for the proposed Dugarajapatnam Green Field Port and Shipbuilding Cluster, according to a government order.

The project requires 2,171 acres identified across Vakadu mandal in Tirupati district and Kota mandal in Nellore district. Administrative sanction of Rs 544.3 crore has been accorded to acquire 2,170.7 acres through the Andhra Pradesh Maritime Board.

"Government, after careful examination of the matter, hereby accords administrative sanction for Rs 544.3 crore to acquire 2,170.7 acres for development of the Dugarajapatnam Green Field Port and Shipbuilding Cluster," said MT Krishna Babu, special chief secretary, Infrastructure and Investment (Ports).

Of the total land identified, 1,932 acres comprise patta land and habitations, while 239 acres are government land. In Tirupati district, land has been identified in Pathetipalem, Vagarru, Valamedu and Pamanji villages. *—PTI*

-PTI

We've been able to build depth in squad: Marsh

COLOMBO, 5 FEB

Australian captain Mitchell Marsh on Thursday placed faith in his team's depth to cover the absence of injured pacers Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood during the ICC T20 World Cup, beginning from Saturday. Cummins was ruled out of the marquee event with a back strain and Hazlewood will miss a couple of matches in the group phase because of an Achilles niggle. "I think we've got a lot of bases covered. One of the great things about Pat and Josh especially, being all three format players, is that we've been able to build a lot of depth within our squad and the guys that have come in have played a lot of cricket for our group," Marsh said during Captains' Briefing ahead of the World Cup here.—*PTI*

-PTI

BOXAM Elite 2026: Lovlina starts with a win

UKRAINE, 5 FEB

Olympic bronze medallist Lovlina Borgohain started her campaign with a confident blanking of Ukraine's Olha Pylypchuk, while Hitesh Gulia also rolled on as Indians extended their strong run in the BOXAM Elite International 2026 here. In the women's 75kg category, Lovlina was in her commanding self, pipping Pylypchuk 5:0. She controlled the bout throughout, combining sharp combinations with disciplined movement to ease into the next round. In the men's 70kg section, Hitesh continued his impressive form, shutting out Canada's Vincent with a dominant 5:0 verdict. Apart from Lovlina, India's other women's boxers delivered a series of convincing performances.—*PTI*

Suruchi-Rana clinch air pistol mixed team silver

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Indian shooting prodigy Suruchi Singh and world champion Samrat Rana dazzled but had to settle for silver in the 10m air pistol mixed team event at the Asian Championship here on Thursday. India, buoyed by Esha Singh's women's air pistol gold on Wednesday, had another fruitful day, though the top podium eluded them in the senior section. The Suruchi-Rana duo scored 479.6 a new world and Asian junior record but Uzbekistan clinched gold with a world-record 481.3. The Indian duo hit the ground running, posting 100.5 in the first series to lead the four-team final.—*PTI*

CWG medallist Poojari wins senior 60kg gold

MODINAGAR, 5 FEB

Two-time Commonwealth Games medallist Gururaja Poojari showcased his experience and class with a clinical performance to win the senior men's 60kg gold medal on the second day of the IWLF National Youth, Junior and Senior Weightlifting Championships here on Thursday. The Karnataka lifter, who had claimed silver in the 56kg category at the 2018 Commonwealth Games and followed up with a bronze in the 61kg division at the 2022 edition, finished with a commanding total of 269kg to top the podium. Poojari lifted 119kg in the snatch before sealing the contest with a top lift of 150kg effort—*PTI*

U-19 World Cup: Buoyed by George, Mhatre finding form

India keyed up for final vs England

HARARE, 5 FEB

In pursuit of a record-extending sixth title, the Indian Under-19 cricket team would bank on its swashbuckling batting line-up when it takes on a gritty England in what promises to be an evenly-matched summit clash of the ICC Under-19 World Cup here on Friday.

India's successful chase of a massive total to humble Afghanistan in the semifinal, where skipper Ayush Mhatre and opener Aaron George finally produced innings of substance, augurs well for the five-time champions, aiming to regain the trophy they last lifted in 2022. India has shown tremendous resolve from the very first group match against the United States. In the semifinal, they decimated a hardened Afghanistan side to maintain a blemish-free record despite being in pursuit of a 300-plus target.

They now face another unbeaten team in England.

India will be aware that England has reached this far after knocking out defending champions Australia and will be high on confidence.

To pull off the win, India will need a collective performance befitting the quality in their line-up, studded with batting prodigy Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, whose firestorm approach has left opposition teams struggling for answers.

Sooryavanshi, who turns 15 next month, has already struck three half-centuries and a blazing century in the final could be the driving force that propels India to the title.

However, he will need to exercise caution against an England side boasting a strong pace battery, led by Manny Lumsden, who has been pivotal to their campaign. He could prove more than a handful if India's top-order batters indulge in nonchalant shot selection. Match starts at 1:00pm. —*PTI*

India U19 beat Afghanistan U-19 to secure a place in final vs England in the 2026 Under 19 World Cup -*ICC*

WINTER OLYMPICS

Abhinav Bindra carried the Olympic torch for Milan-Cortina 2026 -*PTI*

Honoured to carry Olympic flame: Bindra

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Olympic gold medallist shooter Abhinav Bindra on Thursday said he is "truly humbled" and "honoured" after carrying the Olympic torch ahead of the Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics, describing it as a symbol of unity and perseverance.

The Winter Olympics begin on Friday at Milan and Cortina d'Ampezzo in Italy.

"Honoured to carry the Olympic flame at @milanocortina26. A symbol of unity, perseverance, and shared human aspiration," Bindra wrote on 'X' along with a few pictures taken on a rainy day.

Bindra, a gold winner in the 10m air rifle event in the 2008 Beijing Olympics, was selected as one of the torch-bearers in October last year.

The Winter Olympics will conclude on 22.

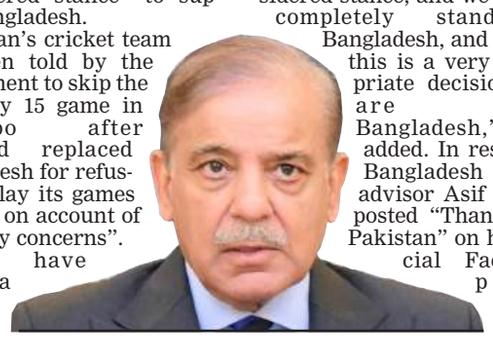
This will be the fourth Winter Olympics to be hosted by Italy. The edition will feature 116 medal events across 16 disciplines, an increase of seven events and one discipline from Beijing 2022. —*PTI*

Decision to boycott India game appropriate: Pak PM Sharif

KARACHI, 5 FEB

Calling Pakistan's boycott of their T20 World Cup match against India an "appropriate decision, the country's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has said on Thursday that it was a "considered stance" to support Bangladesh.

Pakistan's cricket team has been told by the government to skip the February 15 game in Colombo after Scotland replaced Bangladesh for refusing to play its games in India on account of "security concerns".



"We have taken a very clear stand on the T20 World Cup that we won't play the match against India because there should be no politics on the sports field," Sharif stated after a government meeting here.

"We have taken a very considered stance, and we should completely stand by Bangladesh, and I think this is a very appropriate decision. We are with Bangladesh," he added. In response, Bangladesh sports advisor Asif Nazrul posted "Thank You, Pakistan" on his official Facebook page, while quoting Sharif's statement.

India game not in our control: Pak skipper Salman Agha

Maintaining his cricket board's stance, Pakistan skipper Salman Ali Agha on Thursday stressed that the decision to boycott the T20 World Cup match against India was taken by their government and was "not in our control."

Pakistan on Sunday announced a boycott of its high-profile men's T20 World Cup group league fixture against India on February 15 here. However, the Pakistani government cleared the national team's participation in the rest of the global event starting 7 February. —*PTI*

OUR FLIGHT IS BOOKED, WE ARE GOING

SKY TO INDIA'S T20WC MATCH AGAINST PAKISTAN

MUMBAI, 5 FEB

India skipper Suryakumar Yadav on Thursday said his team will travel to Colombo for its ICC T20 World Cup match against Pakistan even though the neighbouring country has announced a boycott of the game.

The Indian skipper did, however, acknowledge that the situation is not easy for those involved in the issue, including the ICC, which has warned Pakistan of serious consequences. "I feel it is not an easy job. It is not my call. I am sure they (the ICC) might be working out something as well but it has come from the other government or the nation, how can they (the ICC) help as well?" Suryakumar said during the pre-tournament captains' press conference here at the BCCI headquarters. India is scheduled to face the arch-rivals on 15 February, but Pakistan's cricket team has been told by its government to skip the game after Scotland replaced Bangladesh for refusing to play in India on account of "security concerns".

"...their (Pakistan's) decision is not in my control.

I wish I could take their decisions, but then it is their call," Suryakumar said. —*PTI*

Anurag is free to participate in BCCI affairs: SC

The Supreme Court on Thursday modified its 2017 order in a major relief for former Board of Control for Cricket in India president and current BJP Lok Sabha MP Anurag Thakur and said he shall be free to participate in the affairs of the cricket board according to rules and regulations. On 2 January, 2017, the court had directed Thakur to "forthwith cease from being associated with the working of BCCI".A Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant said Thakur was "hitherto free to participate in the affairs of the BCCI as per the rules.

BATC: India lose 2-3 to Thailand but qualify for quarters

QINGDAO, 5 FEB

Young Tanvi Sharma produced a stunning win, but defending champions India suffered a narrow 2-3 loss to Thailand in their second Group Y match of the Badminton Asia Team Championships here on Thursday.

However, despite the defeat, India qualified for the quarterfinals.

India, which had beaten Myanmar 5-0 in their opening tie on Wednesday, finished second in Group Y behind Thailand after the five-match rubber.

World No. 42 Tanvi, a member of India's historic gold medal-winning team at the 2024 edition, stunned world No. 16 Busanan Ongbamrungphan 21-14, 17-21, 21-18 in a gripping contest lasting one hour and three minutes to give India a superb start.

The doubles pair of Gayatri Gopichand and Treesa Jolly then battled past world No. 65 Tidapron Kleebyeesun and Nattamon Laisuan 21-14, 20-22, 21-11 to hand India a 2-0 lead at the Qingdao Conson Gymnasium.

However, Rakshitha Ramraj failed to get past 19-year-old Pitchamon Opatniputh -- the 2023 World Junior champion and 2026 Indonesia Masters runner-up -- going down 19-21, 17-21 as Thailand pulled one back to trail 1-2. —*PTI*

Keerthana to meet Anupama in SFs

DOHA, 5 FEB

India's Keerthana Pandian stormed into the women's semifinals with a comfortable victory over Hong Kong's Chu Pui Ying in the Asian Snooker Championships here on Thursday.

The 3-1 verdict helped Keerthana set up a mouthwatering semifinal showdown against former champion and compatriot Anupama Ramachandran, the reigning IBSF World champion. Anupama took a tougher route to the last-four stage, overcoming Hong Kong's Yee Ting Cheung 3-2. Amee Kamani, the third Indian to make the knockouts, frittered away the advantage to go down 2-3, after being 2-0 up, to Hong Kong's Ho Yee Ki.

After getting off to a slow start, Keerthana found her bearings as the match wore on to push her rival onto the backfoot with her clever play. She scored when she got her chances and then kept her on a tight leash when she lost position. —*PTI*

Interactive Messi exhibition to tour Mumbai, Bengaluru

DBENGALURU, 5 FEB

An exhibition offering an interactive and multisensory journey through the defining moments of football icon Lionel Messi's life and career will make stops in Mumbai and Bengaluru.

Titled 'The Messi Experience World Tour', the event is produced and promoted by BookMyShow Live, the live entertainment division of BookMyShow.

According to a press release, the exhibition traces Messi's journey from his early days in Rosario to lifting the FIFA World Cup trophy in Qatar, allowing fans to relive the emotional and inspiring chapters that shaped one of football's greatest players.

The exhibition will premiere in Mumbai on March 20 before heading to Bengaluru from 19 June.

The Indian edition will be held at Century Mills in Lower Parel, Mumbai, and at Bhartiya City Mall here.

The exhibition has previously had successful runs in cities including Buenos Aires, Puerto Rico, Panama, Beijing, Chicago, Mexico City, Miami, Los Angeles, and Sao Paulo, among others, the release said. —*PTI*

Yuki Bhambri

DOUBLES IS NOT A SIDESHOW: YUKI BHAMBRI

BENGALURU, 5 FEB

For a player once tipped to be among India's finest singles exponents, Yuki Bhambri's career arc has followed an unexpected but instructive path.

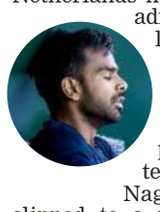
Injuries stalled his singles rise soon after he broke into the ATP top-100, sponsorship uncertainty compounded the challenges, and the promise many saw remained largely unfulfilled in that format.

Yet, at 30-something, Bhambri finds himself in the middle of the most productive phase of his professional life as India's leading doubles player.

In the last 18 months, he won four ATP titles, made a Grand Slam semifinal, and is a case study of what structured support can do to elite talent.

Feeling better day by day: Sumit Nagal

India's number one singles player, Sumit Naga,l on Thursday said he is feeling "better day by day" as he continues his recovery from a minor hip tear ahead of India's Davis Cup tie against the Netherlands here, even as he admitted that the last season was a harsh reminder of the unforgiving nature of professional tennis.



Nagal, who has slipped to a ranking of 281 after a difficult 2025 season marred by loss of form and the resultant lack of results, said the last three weeks of focused rehabilitation have given him confidence going into the tie. Feeling good, feeling better day by day. —*PTI*

MAN CITY BEATS NEWCASTLE 3-1

MANCHESTER, 5 FEB

The current top two in the Premier League will go head-to-head at Wembley Stadium next month after City beat Newcastle 3-1 on Wednesday to complete a 5-1 win on aggregate in the semifinals.

Both City and Arsenal are still in contention for a clean sweep of trophies this season. The League Cup is the chance to lift the first piece of major silverware this term and to potentially inflict a psychological blow in the race for the title.

"We're here to win trophies, and we give our best every day to reach these finals and win the silverware," City forward Omar Marmoush who scored two goals on the night told Sky Sports. —*PTI*

FIH MEN'S PRO LEAGUE

Hockey India announces 24-member squad

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Hockey India on Thursday announced a 24-member Indian men's team for the opening leg of the FIH Pro League to be held from February 10 to 15 at the Birsa Munda International Hockey Stadium in Rourkela, Odisha.

Hockey India had announced a list of 33 probables last month for the coaching camp ahead of the season, which has now been pruned to a 24-member squad for the Rourkela leg of the event. The home leg will feature international heavyweights Argentina and Belgium, besides India.

India, under chief coach Craig Fulton, will play two matches each against Argentina and Belgium -*HI MEDIA*

"It's an exciting mix of youth and experience. We have young talents like Rosan (Kujur), Manmeet (Singh), and Amandeep coming through, while the presence of senior players, including those from the India A setup, adds valuable experience," chief coach Craig Fulton said in a release.

"That balance is important for us. Belgium and Argentina are quality sides, but we believe in our abilities and are focused on delivering our best performances."

The Indian squad features a blend of experienced players and young talent across departments as the team looks to make a strong start to its Pro League campaign on home soil. Goalkeeping duties will be handled by Suraj Karkera and Pawan. The defensive unit includes captain Harmanpreet Singh, Amit Rohidas, Jarmanpreet Singh, Jugraj Singh, Sumit, Sanjay, and Nilam Sanjeep Xess. —*PTI*